ISSUE 401
EMPIRE JUNE 2022

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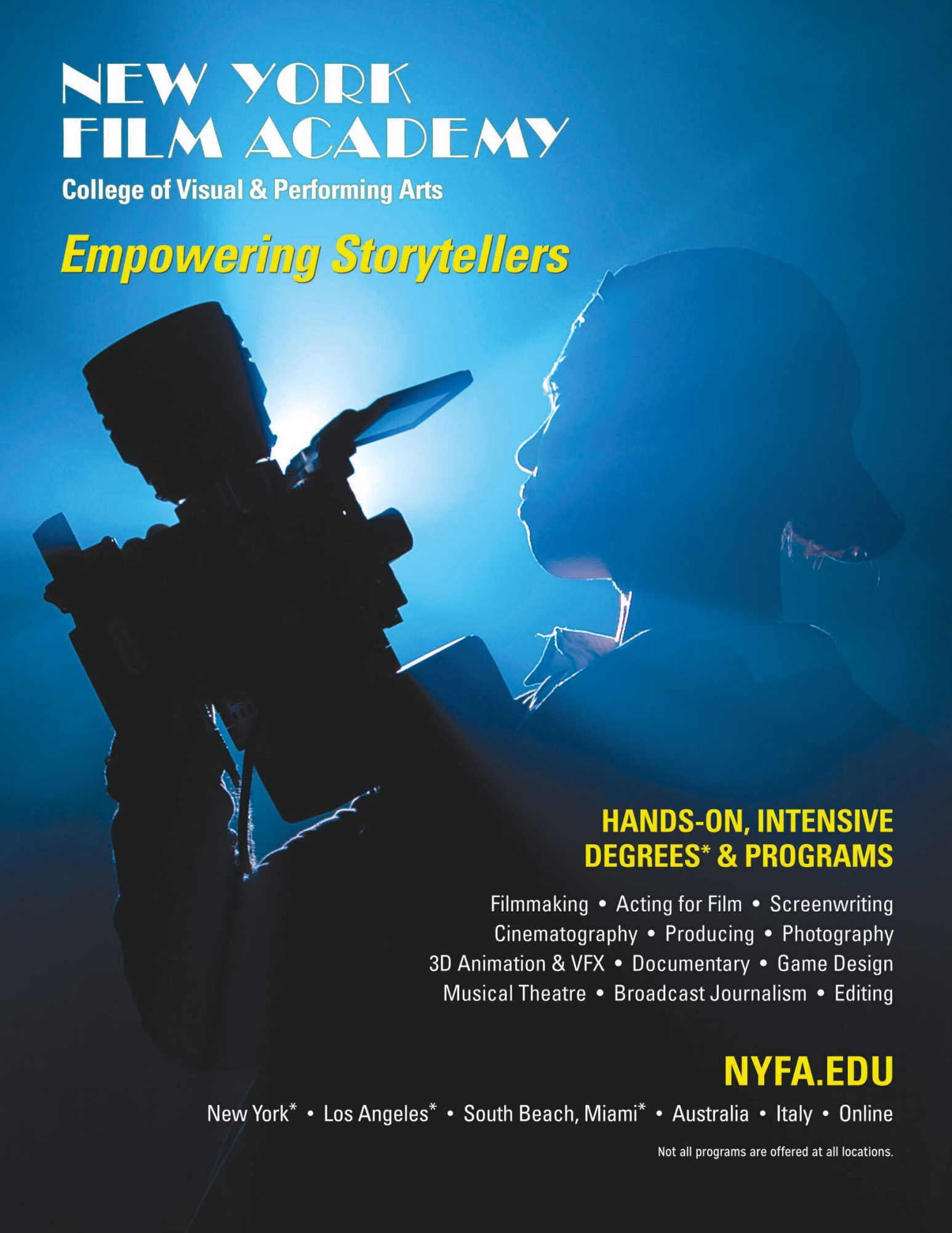
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NICOLAS CAGE
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EDITOR



PHOTOGRAPHY **ART STREIBER**

The cast of *Jurassic World Dominion*, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in Los Angeles on 6 March 2022.

WAY BACK IN 1993, this magazine's *Jurassic Park* preview feature ran with the headline, "IT'S BIG!" We briefly considered updating those words for this issue's cover story on *Jurassic World Dominion*, before deciding against it. After all, "IT'S REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY BIG (SERIOUSLY, IT'S MASSIVE)" just didn't look quite right on the page.

Dominion is the kind of epic movie that doesn't come along every day. The climax to not one but five dinosaur-crammed blockbusters, it's got marauding creatures the size of a Caffè Nero. Action spectacle on land, air and water. And the return of three iconic characters last seen together heading towards a sunset in a helicopter in '93. In short, everything but the Kitchensinkosaurus.

To do it justice, we've gone all in. I emerged after months of lockdown, having barely seen a human in months, to spend a bizarre, brilliant night on set at Pinewood Studios, meeting eerily life-like animatronic creatures (you haven't lived until you've seen a Dilophosaurus scamper towards you, operated by 11 people). And Creative Director Chris Lupton headed to LA in March this year to oversee our world-exclusive cover shoot with the movie's stars and some prehistoric friends. The results are, I'm sure you'll agree, stunning. Pro tip, though: never ask a Pyroraptor to say, "Cheese."

Elsewhere, we catch up with an incredible array of A-listers: Tom Cruise, Elisabeth Moss, Nicolas Cage and Mike Myers, to name but a few. We even got Mick Jagger on the phone for a natter, telling us how he ended up writing a song for a Gary Oldman spy series. Yes, that's right — this issue has gathered both a Rolling Stone and Moss.

In other words? IT'S BIG.



NICK DE SEMLYEN
EDITOR
@nickdesemlyen

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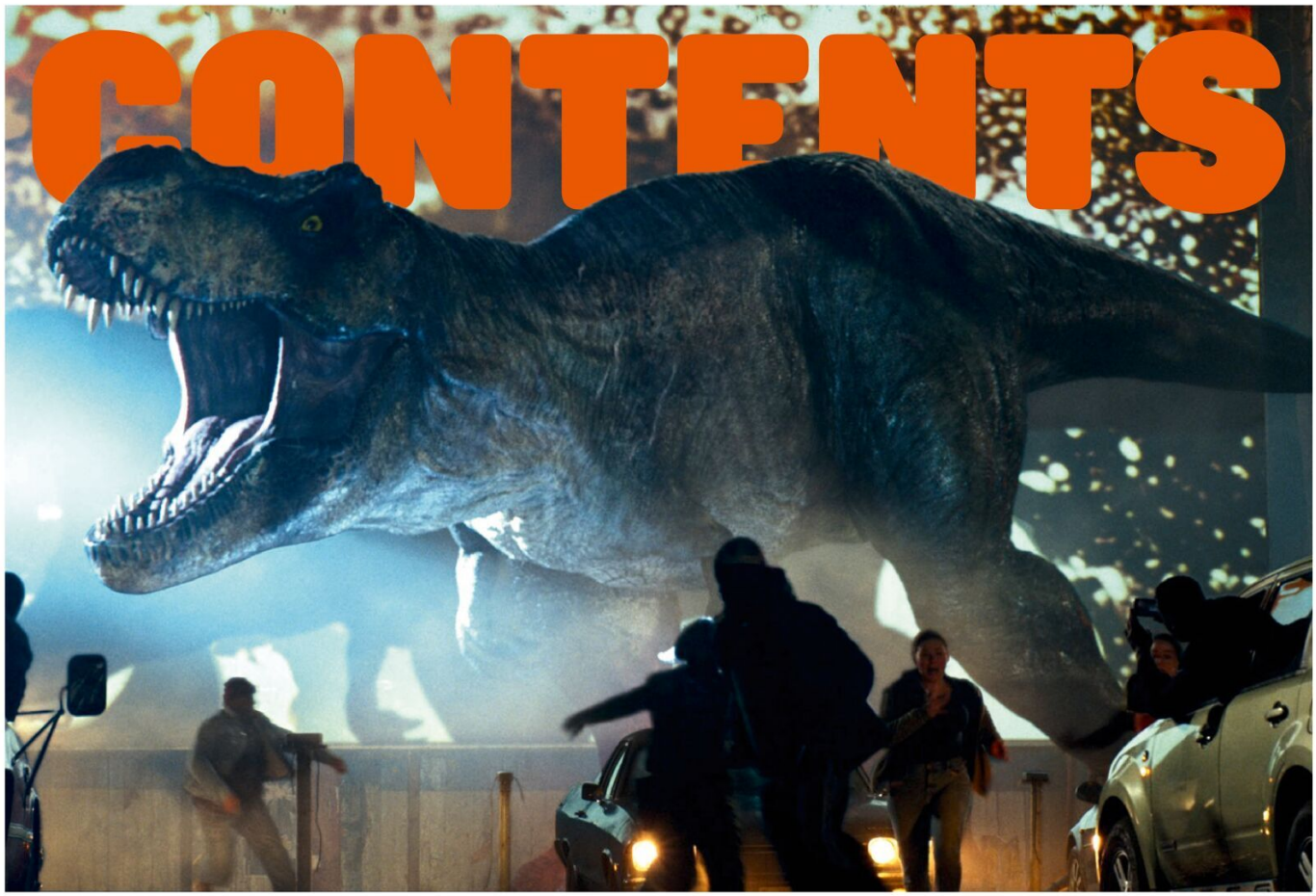
This month's exclusive subscriber cover by Matt Dartford

TURN TO PAGE 43 FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Art Streiber, Marco Vittur

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CONTENTS



TAKE 20

8 BULLET TRAIN
Action guru David Leitch on his new movie, in which Brad Pitt boards a train and finds himself in a desperate fight for his life with deadly assassins. Those buffet cars can be really tough.

14 TRAILER TALK
Team *Empire* talks about *The Offer*, the TV show that details the making of *The Godfather*. Now this is an offer you can probably refuse.

16 MICK JAGGER
Don't tell Thanos — we've got the biggest Stone of all!

24 THE PENTAVERATE
Mike Myers is back, and he's brought Mike Myers, Mike Myers, Mike Myers, Mike Myers, Mike Myers, Mike Myers and Mike Myers with him.

29 PINT OF MILK
Just Joshing with Mr Brolin, star of *Outer Range*.

FEATURES

52 JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION
Life finds a way. In a world exclusive, *Empire* visits the set of Colin Trevorrow's epic threequel, and spends a night running away from dinosaurs. Embarrassingly, they turned out to be animatronic dinosaurs.

64 TOP GUN: MAVERICK
At long last, the sequel to the movie that launched Tom Cruise into the stratosphere is finally about to take off. In this epic oral history of the film's journey to the big screen, Cruise, Christopher McQuarrie, director Joseph Kosinski and more feel the need. The need for screed.

72 MEN
Alex Garland is back with a new horror that says, "Yes, all men."

78 ELISABETH MOSS
Talking new TV show *Shining Girls* with its, ahem, luminous star.

84 THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT
Nicolas Cage on playing a character called Nick Cage (not to be confused with Nic Cage) in the new gonzo action-comedy.

90 GASPAR NOÉ AND DARIO ARGENTO
Speaking of mavericks... Gaspar Noé and Dario Argento have been making their mark outside the mainstream for decades. We get them together, in an interview conducted in French! *Très bien!*

96 NOSFERATU
Celebrating the 100th birthday of arguably the most influential horror movie of all time. Yes, even more so than *Killer Klowns From Outer Space*.

Above: Hear them roar! A tantalising taste of *Jurassic World Dominion* in the Prologue footage released last November. **Below:** *Into The Spider-Verse*'s Spider-Ham busts some Spider-moves.

ON SCREEN

30 THE NORTHMAN
Robert Eggers' Viking take on *Hamlet* has more violence than you can shake a spear at. But is it any good? Spoiler: yes.

34 BENEDETTA
How controversial is Paul Verhoeven's new movie? Nun. Nun more controversial.

46 MOON KNIGHT
Full moon or half moon?

REVIEW

102 DAVID ARQUETTE
The star of *Scream*, and *Screams 2*, *3*, *4* and *5* reflects on life as Dewey Riley.

108 VIEWING GUIDE
The writers of *Spider-Man: No Way Home*? No way!

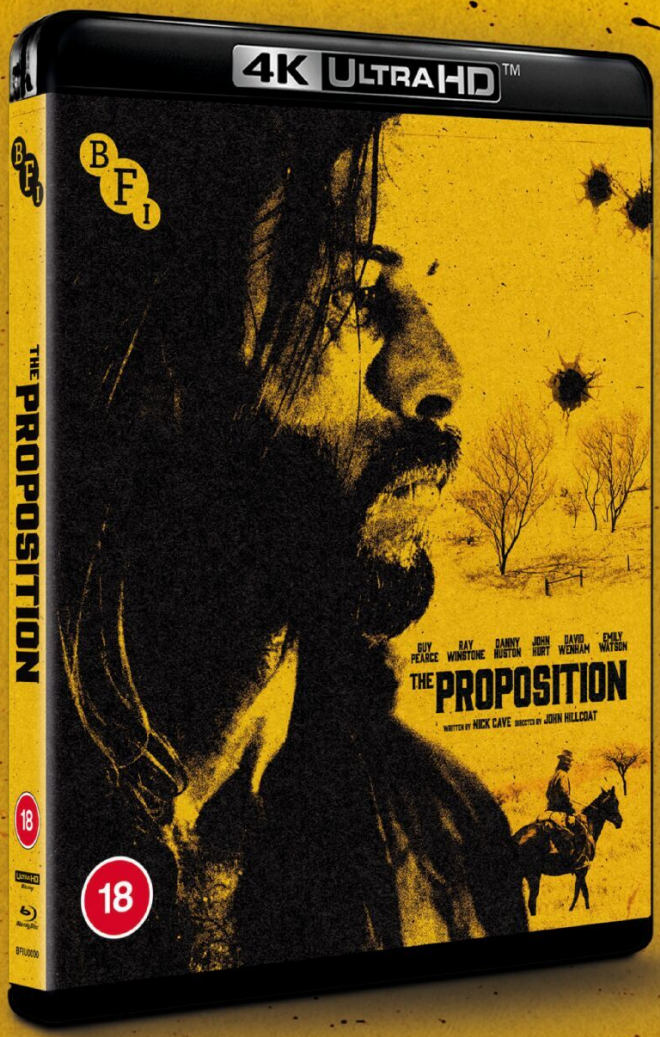
116 CHOPPER
Strewth, it's Eric Bana!



Spine lines issue 400: Newsstand: "Now I know how you feel. Strange place, strange companions. But we're all friends here" is from *Santa Claus: The Movie*. Subs: "Mr Hadden?" "Doctor! How kind of you to call" is from *Contact*.

★★★★

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TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH



THE WAY HOME

Just read Chris Hewitt's story [in the March 2022 issue] on *Spider-Man: No Way Home*'s box-office take. The last paragraph, about cinema in the time of Covid, slew me — finished the article with tears in my eyes, for two years of lost and changed cinema experiences (and everything else). Hopefully, this is really the way home now.

DR GRAHAM WHITE, STIRLING

Hear, hear, Dr Graham. Unfortunately, we can't cast a Doctor Strange*-esque spell to make the last two years go away, but we can give you a Picturehouse membership — for many more return trips home to come. Enjoy!*

Picturehouse *Empire*'s star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the flagship Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.

GO THE WAY OF THE FLYING REPTILES

Come on, *Empire*, after umpteen iterations of *Jurassic Park*, surely you know dinosaurs can't fly? Quetzalcoatlus is not "a humongous, long-necked flying dinosaur" (Take 20, May 2022), it's a flying reptile. Dinosaurs could not fly — or swim, for that matter. Ten out of ten for spelling it right though — don't be a saur loser!

GAVIN BOATE, BIRMINGHAM

Impressive pedantry and punnage, Gavin! Though Jeff Goldblum's line, "You do plan to have flying reptiles on your flying reptile tour, right?" doesn't quite have the same impact.

I CAN ALREADY TELL THAT THE SURPRISE RETURN OF @TERRI_WHITE TO THIS WEEK'S @PILOTTVPOD IS GOING TO BE THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY WEEK. TRYING NOT TO LAUGH OUT LOUD ON THE MORNING COMMUTE IS A STRUGGLE.

@MARKYCATTON

ON ALEX WOLFF JOINING THE INCREASINGLY MASSIVE CAST OF CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S *OPPENHEIMER*: THE CREDITS ARE GOING TO BE AS LONG AS THE FILM.

JOANNA JONES

SERVES YOU, WRIGHT

Big fan, and have been chuckling at the 400 things you've learnt in the latest issue. Among the many tidbits was evidence (if there wasn't already an overabundance available to all with eyes and ears) that Edgar Wright is a genius. I have been banging on about cheese and jam sandwiches for years and only getting odd looks in return. Much like Mr Wright's "controversial" claim, give me a strong cheddar and a thick smothering of strawberry jam between two slices of white bread and it is an absolute pleasure for my mouth. Here's to another 400 excellent issues.

RICHARD MOON, VIA EMAIL

Forget his achievements in filmmaking — Edgar Wright's real talents lie in sandwich innovation. How's that for a slice of fried bread?

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TAKE 20

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER [EDITED BY BETH WEBB]



No./1

All aboard the carnage carriage

David Leitch on why his thriller BULLET TRAIN will be first-class

DAVID LEITCH AND Brad Pitt go way back. Not just to *Deadpool 2*, where Pitt showed up for a one-shot joke in the sequence where the newly formed X-Force get brutally slaughtered (Pitt plays the invisible hero, The Vanisher, flashing that world-famous fizzog of his for one second as he gets electrocuted). But all the way back to 2004, when Pitt entered Action Hero Mode in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. His stunt double on that film? David Leitch. "I've worked with Brad as a stunt double on five movies," laughs Leitch. "We have a history. That cameo on *Deadpool* was the first time he really saw me in the filmmaker role."

So, when Leitch started developing *Bullet Train*, a high-concept action-comedy in which a bunch of highly trained assassins butt heads and guns and more on a Japanese Shinkansen (which can reach speeds of 300km an hour), his thoughts turned immediately to Pitt. "We'd been having a conversation about what we could find to work on, and this script seemed great," says Leitch of









Zak Olkewicz's screenplay, based on the bestselling novel by Kōtarō Isaka. "The irreverent tone, the strong themes, the character that he could connect with. Once he read the draft, he was all over it. 'Let's do this, I know how to play this guy.'"

"This guy" is Ladybug, the assassin whom we follow onto and through the train. Given Leitch's directorial work on *John Wick* and *Atomic Blonde*, you might expect Ladybug to be a stoic, silent killing machine. But Leitch is also the director of *Hobbs & Shaw*, and the aforementioned *Deadpool 2*, both wild and raucous action-comedies that exploded convention when they could. So the film, and Ladybug, are a little more off-kilter.

A reluctant killer clad in glasses and floppy hat, Pitt's performance promises to be deeply comedic; goofy, even. "You hear the title *Bullet Train* and you think, 'Hard-boiled action,'" says Leitch. "But really it's a deliriously fun, heightened, comedic action thriller." And Ladybug? "[He's] someone who's pondering their place in the world. He's having an existential crisis as all of these horrific things are happening around them. It makes him really relatable." Ladybug is also someone who's preoccupied with the mechanics of fate, which is one of the film's big themes. "There's this esoteric strand that goes through it, the butterfly effect," Leitch says. "It's a really fun thing to explore in an action movie."

Yet there's still fun to be had amidst all this existential doubt, thanks in part to the film's surrounding ensemble. Among those joining Pitt on this fateful ride are Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry as badass brothers Lemon and Tangerine ("Their chemistry is amazing. They all do nefarious stuff, but they're incredibly relatable and you root for them"), and Joey King as "a sadistic, unexpected assassin".

When it comes to the action itself, the filmmaker cites Jackie Chan as a key influence. "[There's] a little bit of physical comedy. The fights are designed to enhance the characters. We're here to have fun in this super-contained space," he says. Speaking of which, Leitch and bullet trains also go way back. He designed the sequence in James Mangold's *The Wolverine*, which took place inside, and on top of, a Shinkansen. That was just the warm-up act. "It's really the ultimate challenge," he says. "How do I keep this interesting, for two hours on a train with these assassins? How do you keep upping the stakes? We leaned in and came up with some creative fights." Next stop: mayhem. **CHRIS HEWITT**

Clockwise from left: Doing it for laughs — Brad Pitt as hitman Ladybug; Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny as Wolf; Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Pitt channel those Jackie Chan vibes; Director David Leitch and Logan Lerman on set.

BULLET TRAIN WILL BE IN CINEMAS FROM 29 JULY

No./ 2 From God of Mischief to man of God

TOM HIDDLESTON on his new Victorian-era mystery show *The Essex Serpent*







Top to bottom: Tom Hiddleston with Claire Danes; Danes' character Cora is a widow who is intrigued by the legend of the Essex Serpent; Hiddleston plays local vicar Will Ransome.

TOM HIDDLESTON WAS finishing up the first season of *Loki* when he got the call: would you like to play a vicar? "They sent me the six episode scripts, and a letter from [director] Clio Barnard," Hiddleston recalls. "I was just immediately engaged by it." The scripts he read were an adaptation of *The Essex Serpent*, a bestselling 2016 gothic mystery novel by Sarah Perry, set largely on the rural coastlines of Essex during the late Victorian era. Hiddleston, at the time, was engaged in a battle for the multiverse with a variant of his character that took the form of an alligator. The future job promised quite a different experience.

"New experiences are always full of curiosity and interest to me," he says. Part of that difference was the character he was playing. Loki is complex, to put it generously, with occasional genocidal tendencies; his character in *The Essex Serpent*, Reverend Will Ransome, is fundamentally decent, a family man who cares for his flock, and worries about the effect that rumours of a mythical sea creature are having on his parish. "He has very different foundations in his character," Hiddleston says. "Will is a much more solid and much more responsible person than Loki. I wouldn't put Loki in charge of managing the anxiety of his parishioners."

Hiddleston, who speaks to *Empire* over Zoom, weeks before *Loki* Season 2 begins filming (he clarifies that the framed Miss Minutes poster on the wall behind him is because he is in a production office, "in case you thought my general interior-design taste was just, like, memorabilia from *Loki*"), was excited at the chance to work with Barnard, the British filmmaker whose social-realist background is about as far removed from the MCU as it is possible to get. "She's got a really singular and original voice as a director," he says. "There's a specific curiosity she has towards a certain humanity, I think — characters trying to connect and heal and find the light."

If *The Essex Serpent* has anything in common with the dark prince of Asgard, it might be in its fascination with myths: like the MCU, the story borrows and repurposes ancient folk tales. "It takes place in this God-fearing community," Hiddleston explains, "where people believe a winged dragon-like beast has come up from the depths to steal children. It's a belief in the mythic, and how, when we don't have all the answers, we fill the void with things in our imagination." He flashes a very familiar grin. "Our imagination is not always accurate." Perhaps there is still mischief to be found in this man of God, after all. **JOHN NUGENT**

THE ESSEX SERPENT IS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 13 MAY

Alamy, Getty Images, Shutterstock

No./3 Inside Madonna's bootcamp

Actors are currently competing to play the musician in her upcoming biopic. Here's how they're being tested

THE OPPORTUNITY TO play Madonna, in a biopic directed and co-written by the woman herself, comes once in a lifetime. No wonder everyone from Florence Pugh to *Ozark*'s Julia Garner are lining up to star in a film that's said to span her early career through to her infamous and controversial Blond Ambition tour in 1991. With Madonna organising a bootcamp-style audition process, *Empire* breaks down what it takes to claim the top spot.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Being able to strike a pose is the minimum requirement for playing Madonna. "Troop style, beat boy and vogue" were the dance styles outlined in the original audition call-out for the Blond Ambition tour. Those auditioning — who are reportedly undergoing 11-hour choreography sessions — will be expected to keep in step with the tour's complex and athletic moves, which included Madonna dancing among a trio of mermen during a performance of 'Cherish' and straddling a chair in cycling shorts during 'Keep It Together'.









Top to bottom: Madonna in her iconic Jean Paul Gaultier conical bra; Strike a pose, there's nothing to it — 'Vogue'; Performing 'Like A Virgin' at the 1984 MTV Video Music Awards; Wowing the world at Live Aid, 1985.

COSTUMES

The Blond Ambition tour was a showcase for Madonna's pioneering sense of fashion. Actors can expect to don some of her famed selection of Jean Paul Gaultier conical bras and suspenders, fur-trimmed satin blazers and fishnet stockings, occasionally topped off with a sky-scraping platinum-blonde ponytail.

SINGING

Callback auditions for the role include singing sessions with Madonna. Much like her appearance, the superstar's vocal style can change to suit different songs, meaning that frontrunners will need to do the same to pull off early-career bangers like 'Material Girl' and 'Papa Don't Preach'. As if they weren't nervous enough.

PERSONA

This is no wallflower role; Pope John Paul II himself tried to ban the Blond Ambition tour, which most notoriously saw Madonna theatrically faux-masturbate during 'Like A Virgin', a milestone in a lengthy timeline of public displays of sexuality that the media simultaneously chastised and yet couldn't get enough of. As the star once said, "Sick and perverted always appeals to me." Learning first-hand from the woman who took the press and the Vatican in her stride is what this bootcamp is all about. **BETH WEBB**

No./4 May the horse be with you

The Eopie returns in *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, we rank the ever-so-slightly wrong horses of *Star Wars*



ORBAK

SEEN IN: *THE RISE OF SKYWALKER*

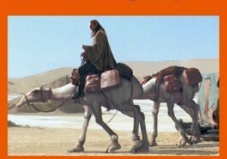
What do you get if you cross a horse with a woolly mammoth? An Orbak! Despite their shaggy hair and tusks, this is the closest to an Earth horse. Except these are as happy galloping into battle on a Star Destroyer as they are grazing on grass.



FATHIER

SEEN IN: *THE LAST JEDI*

What do you get if you cross a horse with a cat? A Fathier! Fast as lightning, tall as a double-decker bus, and ready to gallop through a space-casino at the drop of a hat, these mistreated racing beasts are ready for revolution. Don't resist!



EOPIE

SEEN IN: THE PREQUEL TRILOGY, *OBI-WAN KENOBI*

What do you get if you cross a horse with a tapir? An Eopie! These friendly snoot-horses are ideal transport for a Jedi master, despite their stomach-churning flatulence (see: *The Phantom Menace*).



RANCOR

SEEN IN: *RETURN OF THE JEDI, THE BOOK OF BOBA FETT*

What do you get if you cross a horse with a living nightmare? A Rancor! But aside from having four limbs, Rancors have very little in common with a noble steed. If you see one in the wild, don't offer it a carrot. **BEN TRAVIS**



EXTREMELY EQUINE

PRETTY PONY

A LITTLE HORSE

WE SAY NEIGH







No./5

Dashcam

[ON SET REPORT]

Empire meets Rob Savage as he films the follow-up to his buzzy debut *Host*

WHERE? Campbell Studios, East London.

WHEN? 9 December 2020.

WHY? To find out how Rob Savage, the director of *Host*, is following up his Zoom-brewed, lockdown horror hit — the first of a three-picture deal he's signed with Blumhouse Productions, the people behind *The Purge*, *Get Out* and *The Invisible Man*. While still a pandemic-related, found-footage affair (swapping video chat for an iPhone livestream), *Dashcam* sees Savage operating on a bigger, gorier scale. "It's just like *Host*, except there's more sticky blood!" he grins.

WHAT DID WE SEE? Like the man said, a lot of sticky blood. All over Savage. All over the floor of the East London studio space he's commandeered. All over the five dead suicide cultists lying around on that floor. And all over actors Annie Hardy (a freestyling Californian musician and livestreamer, playing an amplified version of herself) and Angela Enahoro (a pilates instructor making her film debut as Annie's demonically troublesome companion). Though it's not all claret in here; the room is also wallpapered with torn-out Bible pages. Creepy.

WHAT WAS BEING FILMED? A tussle between Hardy and Enahoro. Hardy is on her back, flailing around with a knife. She has an iPhone strapped to her head, its torch the only source of light in the room. On top of her is Enahoro, gnashing at Hardy with prosthetic teeth, while Savage crouches nearby shouting things like, "Snap, snap, snap, like a fucking piranha!" and, "Make a sound like a rabid dog!" Eventually, the real Enahoro is swapped out for an eerily life-like puppet replica, designed by SFX make-up maestro Dan Martin to have its head sliced almost in half, at the mouth, by Hardy's weapon. Yes, like a Pez dispenser.

WHO'S THIS ANNIE HARDY, THEN? As the creator of a livestream show called *Band Car*, where she drives around LA in the small hours improvising raps based on the messages she's sent, Hardy struck Savage as an ideal subject for a horror movie. Even though, he says, "I disagree with 90 per cent of Annie's politics." Her film incarnation, he explains, "is this whirlwind of selfishness that blows through Margate on a crazy road trip with her liberal friend [Amar Chadha-Patel]. The movie's an attempt to capture Annie's personality and also see how somebody like that reacts when they're faced with a supernatural assailant."

WHAT DOES HARDY HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS? She likes to think she's "a little bit more of an asshole in the film" than in reality, she tells *Empire*. Though she's not sure. "I was like, 'Guys, I seem like a prick in the script. I wouldn't do this, I wouldn't do that.' And ironically, a couple of days later, some really similar situations happened and I was like, 'Oh, I *would* do this and that. Never mind!'"

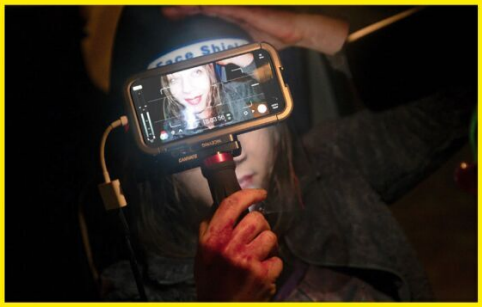
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT? "It's *The House Of The Devil* in a car, basically," says Savage. "That's how I pitched it." So Ti West is a big influence, but the director also relates *Dashcam* to one of Louis Theroux's documentaries, thanks to Hardy's largely improvised involvement. "The set-up is pretty conventional, then you throw Annie in, and suddenly her decision-making throws you off on these crazy tangents that you'd never get in a scripted film." Margate's about to get a violent new makeover, it seems. **DAN JOLIN**

***DASHCAM* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 3 JUNE**

Samuel Dore











Clockwise from main: Director Rob Savage, burning up the screen with his *Host* follow-up; Edward Linard and some of that copious "sticky blood"; As befits its title, the film boasts a fuzzy, found-footage, lo-fi aesthetic; Musician Annie Hardy plays an exaggerated version of herself; Savage proudly stands beside a crushed car on set.



No./6

Powering up — Iman Vellani as Kamala Khan aka Ms. Marvel. **Below:** Vellani with Matt Lintz as Bruno.

Meet Marvel's new kid on the block



Ms. Marvel creator Sana Amanat introduces us to the history-making character ahead of her new TV show

SANA AMANAT REMEMBERS sitting in on a Zoom audition with Iman Vellani, the breakout star now playing Ms. Marvel, aka Kamala Khan, the character that Amanat created. "She showed me every corner of her room, and it was covered with Avengers," she says, laughing. "Then she said, 'Oh wait, I'm not done,' opened up her closet, and there was more Marvel everywhere." Amanat realised then, without question, that Vellani would be Khan, the Pakistani-American high-schooler who worships superheroes — Captain Marvel especially — before becoming one herself. "She gave me a list of feedback on every single Marvel movie," she adds. "Kevin Feige is like her Carol Danvers."

Danvers was the original Ms. Marvel, making her debut in 1968 before being promoted to Captain. Amanat's reimagination of the character was introduced in 2013, and was born from her need to see a superhero who resonated with her own life. "I wanted to create a character that was relatable and fun and awkward, who happened to be to be Muslim," she explains. Skip forward eight years, and her character is now the star of a six-part Disney+ series, helmed by British showrunner Bisha K. Ali. "It's a historic moment," says Amanat, who was also highly involved in the TV adaptation. "But it's also nerve-racking. I've given two years to this show; it's been made with a lot of love and a lot of sweat."

Ms. Marvel will follow Khan's teenage life in Jersey City. "I grew up reading *Nancy Drew* mysteries and watching *Saved By The Bell* and *Degrassi*," says Amanat. "I loved coming-of-age stories. It's all about having crushes and self-discovery." However, when Khan obtains her own cosmic superstrength and ability to manifest purple crystals via a pair of bangles, she learns that, in a similar way to Peter Parker and Miles Morales, having a dual identity is messy.

The show will set up Khan's broader MCU future, as she's also set to join Nia DaCosta's Captain Marvel sequel *The Marvels* alongside Brie Larson's Danvers. However, Amanat promises that this Ms. Marvel "isn't your traditional Avenger". "She's not as slick and suave as some superheroes," she adds fondly. "It's not like when Captain America throws his shield and it comes back. She's all over the place. I'm excited for people to get to know her." All hail Marvel's bright, albeit clumsy, new addition. **BETH WEBB**

MS. MARVEL IS ON DISNEY+ FROM 8 JUNE

TRAILER TALK

The Offer

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team EMPIRE

Beth Webb (News Editor): Are we feeling excited about this project?
John Nugent (Reviews Editor): I think it's an offer I *can* refuse. I'm just getting that out of my system now.
Beth: There's a movie version of this planned with Oscar Isaac and Elisabeth Moss.
Mike Cathro (Deputy Art Director): That's what I thought this was. Then I watched the trailer, and got so confused. I thought, "Where's Oscar Isaac?"
John: Look, I love *The Godfather*. We all love *The Godfather*, right? But I do wish they'd make more original stories.
Beth: It could be interesting. I liked *The Disaster Artist*. That was fascinating because Tommy Wiseau was this elusive character.
Alex Godfrey (Features Editor): I feel like you don't need to have seen *The Room* to enjoy *The Disaster Artist*, though. Here, it's difficult to detach the film from the show.
Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor): I feel like there's gonna be a lot of wigs in this show.
Beth: The sets look pretty exciting.
Mike: It's pretty weird that you can see the massive Paramount tower in a Paramount show. It's 'Paraception'.
Joanna Moran (Photography Director): Maybe Ryan Murphy should've taken this one and thrown a bit more sex and drugs in.
Beth: I think that Ryan Murphy has far too much on his plate and it should stay that way.
Joanna: I think he does some interesting work!
Beth: "Interesting" is definitely the word to use here.
John: I do think the making of this film is really fascinating. It's an important milestone in cinema, it's this clash of independent-minded filmmaking, new Hollywood and old studio worlds. There's solid stuff here.
James Dyer (Editor-In-Chief, Digital): I don't know. I've read *The Godfather*, I've seen the films 1,000 times, but I've never fancied a however-many-hours adaptation about the various meetings that led to it being shot.
Ben: I love how huge everything is in this show. Glasses: make them bigger! Colours: bigger! It's like what the girls in Year Eight used to do at school.
Beth: Yes! We wore those big chunky ties.
Joanna: This shows my age because we always went for a skinny tie.
James: I had a debating-team tie, just saying.
Beth: Of course you did.
John: Is Miles Teller supposed to be playing James Caan?













Beth: No he's one of the producers, Albert Ruddy.
John: They're really showing the unsung heroes here.
Ben: Yeah, this feels like a series that's been pitched by producers who were like, "Hey, guys, you know who the *really* cool guys are in the movies?"
Ben: Please tell me that we're going to get a montage of Miles Teller reading *The Godfather* after saying he hasn't read *The Godfather*.
James: They plumped for the hardback over the paperback edition and you have to respect that.
John: I remember that there was scepticism that it couldn't be turned into a film because it was so massive.
James: It doesn't feel like a hard adaptation. Although to be honest, the book does lend itself more to a miniseries. But they did a good job of adapting it, as we're about to find out.
Alex: In our interview with Francis Ford Coppola for our *Godfather* issue, he slagged off the book a little bit. He said on the surface it was a bit stupid, but underneath it all it was really interesting.
Sophie Butcher (Social Media Editor): They're really getting into the inspiration for that sauce scene.
James: He's gone full Clemenza with the sauce.
Joanna: I tried suggesting to my Italian friend making a risotto in the oven and I almost got excommunicated.
Sophie: They nearly went full *John Wick* on you.
Joanna: Exactly.
Ben: It's men and a token woman.
Joanna: I suppose it was all men then, though, that made the decisions.
Sophie: I'm getting the vibe that Juno Temple's character, Bettye McCart, was the competent person behind Albert Ruddy.
Beth: Behind every good man is a Juno Temple.
Alex: Anything she's in, I'm interested in. She often plays really confident people and she's got this bizarre eccentricity to her as well.
John: I can't wait for Season 3 of this show, where they make *The Godfather Part III* with Sofia Coppola.
Beth: Maybe Sofia Coppola could play Sofia Coppola.
Ben: They could have the scene where they gave Al Pacino his frosted tips.

THE OFFER DOES NOT YET HAVE A UK AIR DATE



INTRODUCING...

Herbert Nordrum

THE NORWEGIAN ACTOR HAS BROKEN BIG IN JOACHIM TRIER'S MILLENNIAL ROMANCE *THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD*

ON GETTING INVOLVED IN THE FILM

I already knew and loved Joachim's earlier work; it's been really important to me. I met him at a few parties — he thought I was fun to hang out with, and asked me if I wanted to be in the film. And I already knew [the film's star] Renate Reinsve because we went to theatre school together, which meant that with the intimate moments we could jump to the core and explore our characters' love in a deeper way. Joachim loves to rehearse so we had lots of time together. We ended up becoming like a family.

ON THE FILM'S INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

It's been crazy! At the premiere in Cannes the audience was clapping for eight minutes. Then the Oscar nominations came — it was overwhelming, but in a good way. And Paul Thomas Anderson said he loved the film, and for me that was bigger than any nomination. That meant everything to me.

ON HIS ACTING FUTURE

I'm currently playing Hamlet, which theatre-wise is the coolest thing I've done. I'd love to do some English-language films, because like music, film has no language barrier. Especially now with Scandinavian actors speaking English and English actors speaking Scandinavian. It feels like a very open world right now.

LILLIAN CRAWFORD

***THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD* IS IN CINEMAS NOW, AND ON MUBI FROM 13 MAY**

Alamy, Getty Images

No./7 Is the film industry finally listening?

Empire contributor Liam O'Dell gives a personal view on a historic year for Deaf representation

When *CODA* defied early predictions and scored Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards, the audience stood and signed their applause. It was a small gesture, sure, but I can't help but feel as though the rising representation of Deaf people in cinema has finally brought hearing people to a point we've been pushing them towards for decades: to connect with us.

CODA is one of two films that have scored big this awards season that feature sign language, along with fellow Oscar-winner *Drive My Car*, a Japanese road drama that features a mute actor performing a stunning monologue in Korean Sign Language.

This on-screen representation isn't always perfect. *Sound Of Metal*, for example, takes a very hearing-centric approach when showing Riz Ahmed's Deaf drummer Ruben looking to "cure" his hearing and reconnect with music. Yet it does have its moments. 'Dinner-table syndrome', the devastating isolation Deaf people experience in inaccessible social situations, is flipped on its head in the film, when Ruben finds himself disorientated around signing Deaf people. In *CODA*, when protagonist Ruby sings on stage, her Deaf parents disengage completely, hilariously deciding to talk about their spaghetti dinner instead.

I cannot understate the impact of this representation. Deaf children finally have a superhero to dress up as thanks to Makkari in *Eternals*, as Lauren Ridloff, the actor playing her, notes. Hearing people are being made more aware of the barriers we face through *CODA*, picking up basic signs as a result. It's helped by the fact that, unlike the French film on which it's loosely based, *CODA* cast Deaf actors in Deaf roles.

grow more and more hopeful about what comes next. Casting for an upcoming Michael B. Jordan project — presumably *Creed III* — specifically appealed for Deaf children to audition. There's also *A Quiet Place Part III*, and Marvel's *Echo*, which will see *Hawkeye* standout Maya (Alaqua Cox) take centre stage.

Bigger franchises are noticing our talent, and that is to be welcomed, but we must continue to be cautious of a one-size-fits-all approach to Deaf representation. Directors must value our whole identities as individuals. Our language, while visually stunning, is only one part of what makes us, and our culture, so fascinating to explore on screen.



Main: Troy Kotsur with his Oscar for *CODA*. **Right:** Park Yoo-rim in *Drive My Car*. **Far right:** *Eternals* superhero Makkari (Lauren Ridloff).



No./8

Mick Jagger's mission to write the perfect spy song

The Rolling Stones frontman speaks exclusively to *Empire* about creating rare original music for SLOW HORSES

OVER THE YEARS, cinema has not exactly been reluctant to embrace the majesty of The Rolling Stones. From a climactic rendition of 'Sweet Virginia' in *Knives Out* to pretty much the entire filmography of Martin Scorsese, Mick Jagger's signature wail has been a staple at the movies. "Some people don't really like to license their songs for TV and movies, but I think the Stones were very like-minded to it. And I enjoy it," says Jagger, talking to *Empire*. "Sometimes it's weird if you're in the middle of enjoying a movie, or not enjoying a movie, and suddenly one of your songs comes on, if you've forgotten you licensed it."

Yet the appearance of a custom-written Jagger original is a rarity, which is why it's something of a surprise to find him collaborating with composer Daniel Pemberton on 'Strange Game', the theme song for new show *Slow Horses*, starring Gary Oldman as a foul-mouthed maverick spy who gets one last crack at a major case. As luck would have it, Jagger was well prepared when Pemberton reached out.

"I had read some of the books," says the rock star of the Mick Herron series of novels upon which the six-part series is based. "So when Daniel emailed me, I didn't have to do homework. I knew what it was about, I knew the milieu, and the main character's irascible nature." So, Jagger was in, coming up with lyrics like "surrounded by losers, misfits and boozers". "I just wrote it really quick," he adds. "I said to Dan, 'So, you want this to be called 'Slow Horses'?' He said, "I don't want another variant of your horse songs.'" A spin on 1971's 'Wild Horses', then, was off the cards. "So then I started playing guitar and tried to come up with a bit of a chorus, and came up with this 'strange game' thing. That became the title."

Jagger doesn't appear in the show, but then he rarely appears in much on screen. Since he burst onto the screen in 1968 in *Performance*, he's only appeared in a handful of films. One minute he'll pop up in sci-fi oddity *Freejack*, the next he'll cameo in hard-hitting drama *Bent*. And it's not all down to the demands of the day job. "There aren't that many great parts, to be honest," he says. "You get offered a lot of rubbish. In the '70s and '80s, there was a lot of prejudice against musicians being actors."

So, if you want to have Mick Jagger in your movie, you're probably better off using his voice. Just like Scorsese, whose love of the Stones has led to a longstanding friendship and collaboration with the singer. "I usually go and see him and watch what he's doing in the editing room with Thelma [Schoonmaker], which is always fascinating," says Jagger. "We have a good relationship. He's a big fan of English film. He's always a great guy to talk to."

The pair worked together in 2008 on Stones documentary *Shine A Light*, but Scorsese's worship of the band is evident in his movies, into which he's always keen to work a track or two. 'Gimme Shelter' has cropped up in three Scorsese films. "He's used 'Can't You Hear Me Knocking' as well, which is a bit surprising in some ways," laughs Jagger. "And no, he doesn't get a discount deal!" Perhaps lending his slow, surreal crooning to *Slow Horses* has awakened an appetite for more original collaborations in Jagger. You can only hope that he'll give us satisfaction. **CHRIS HEWITT**

SLOW HORSES IS OUT NOW ON APPLE TV+. 'STRANGE GAME' IS AVAILABLE FROM ALL MUSIC PROVIDERS



Steven Klein



Left: Mick Jagger — co-writer and singer of *Slow Horses'* 'Strange Game'. **Below, top to bottom:** Gary Oldman returns to the spying game as Jackson Lamb; Freddie Fox and Kristin Scott Thomas also star; Grumpy old Jackson is a big fan of swearing.









Here: With friends like these… **Below:** Pete (Tom Stourton) has a *really* bad birthday weekend.

No./9 How to make the year's most paranoid film

The writers of British indie All My Friends Hate Me explain the fine art of self-doubt

DRAW ON YOUR WORST MEMORIES

Tom Stourton knows a thing or two about feeling like the butt of the joke. The co-writer and star of the tightly wound *All My Friends Hate Me*, in which his character, Pete, is subjected to a nightmarish birthday weekend, remembers attending the wedding of distant friends after a big night out. As the day progressed, Stourton, who was feeling hungover and somewhat frazzled, worried that he had been invited as a prank. "It came to the speeches, and I thought that the groom was going to announce that the funniest part of the day was that I thought that I'd been invited for real," he tells *Empire*.

CREATE EXTREME PRANKS

In the film, Pete is subjected to japes of varying intensity, from a car driving off without him to finding himself staring down the barrel of a gun. "You're always on that knife's edge between people having a joke and genuine cruelty," says Stourton. He and his co-writer Tom Palmer had plenty of source material to work with. "You hear about these stag dos where they kidnap the stag in a van," says Palmer. "If you were the stag, and you say, 'Guys, this isn't funny,' that wouldn't go down well because it's not banter."

STAGE A HORROR FILM IN SOMEONE'S HEAD

"We wanted to show this environment that should be really nice, but there's this hostility to it," says Stourton of the stately home that hosts Pete's descent into delusion. The film uses genre tropes to help raise the stakes. "We thought, 'Let's use violin strings, and have a wide shot of someone's eyes as as this really scary idea suddenly dawns on them,'" Palmer explains.

GO BACK IN TIME

To school up on paranoia, Palmer consulted *Letters Of Note*, a collection of missives from historical characters. "There's a letter from fourth-century China, and it's this woman apologising for her behaviour at dinner," he recalls. "It literally read like the sort of text message that I would send at university on a Saturday morning."

DON'T AVOID COMEDY

To the writers, their film shares some DNA with *Meet The Parents*. "We wanted to draw on those same comedic tropes, and that absurdity," says Stourton. "It's supposed to be a funny film," he adds. "I think it says something about us being slightly sick, but we just find these things very funny." **BETH WEBB**

ALL MY FRIENDS HATE ME IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 JUNE





No./10 Natasha Lyonne is defying time. Again.

The RUSSIAN DOLL star and co-creator confronts the past in the second season

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN you stop a time loop of continuous death and decide to start living? That's where you'll find Natasha Lyonne's Nadia Vulvokov in the second season of Netflix show *Russian Doll*, after breaking free of a cycle that forced her to relive her 36th birthday party.

If Season 1 of the darkly comic, highly conceptual show was about self-destruction in your mid-thirties, Season 2 is about intergenerational trauma and, as Lyonne, who is also the show's co-creator, says, a chance to "illuminate a deeper spectrum of humanity".

Set almost four years after Season 1's finale, Nadia is in the final weeks before her 40th birthday. But this is *Russian Doll*, and soon Nadia and her fellow time-loop traveller Alan (Charlie Barnett) are confronted by a portal in Manhattan that takes them into their pasts.

"It's an escape hatch away from the responsibility of being a participating member of society," Lyonne tells *Empire*. "There's this middle-aged expectation on us to show up, which means that we're now the adults."

Season 1, in which Nadia wrestles with her relationships and responsibilities, was a semi-autobiographical story, says Lyonne. The new episodes, however, gave her the chance to move away from past grievances. "We're only as sick as our secrets, so there is healing and relief in leading a life of transparency," she muses. The concept of the portal that confronts Nadia with her past was a way for her to "be grateful for an intense access to extreme human condition."

Lyonne cast close friends in Season 1, including Chloë Sevigny, who she describes as her "sister", and she encouraged her cast mates to recommend their platonic family for Season 2. "Working with friends makes the history between people even in small scenes feel palpable," she explains.

As for fears that after a three-year break the audience may have forgotten about Nadia, Lyonne says she felt so much "goodwill in my soul" after the first season. The show's return still feels "scary" to Lyonne, but the good kind of scary. "*Russian Doll* is a philosophical and existential psychedelic adventure," she says. "It's asking more questions than it answers." Be prepared to be even more confused and yet understood than before. **REBECCA LEWIS**





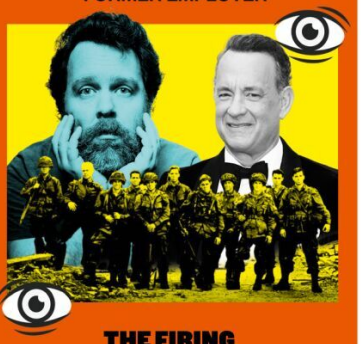
Top to bottom: Natasha Lyonne returns as the time-looping traveller Nadia Vulvokov; Charlie Barnett as Alan Zaveri; *Schitt's Creek*'s Annie Murphy (right) joins the cast.

RUSSIAN DOLL SEASON 2 IS ON NETFLIX FROM 20 APRIL

No./11

THE UPSIDE TO BEING FIRED BY TOM HANKS

PODCAST HOST CONNOR RATLIFF BREAKS DOWN HIS 22-YEAR QUEST FOR ANSWERS FROM HIS FORMER EMPLOYER



THE FIRING

"It was a concentrated moment of failure," says *Dead Eyes* host Connor Ratliff of the day Tom Hanks — writer-director of *Band Of Brothers* Episode 5 — fired him from his big break (playing 'Pvt. Zielinski') before shooting in 2000. Hanks had apparently let him go for having "dead eyes", and the whole incident put Ratliff off acting for a decade.

THE PODCAST

The incident gradually became "a charming story to tell people". That story became an "*X-Files* model" podcast in 2019, where the arc is "the government conspiracy" (Hanks firing Ratliff), but you still get "monsters of the week" (other tales of showbiz disappointment).

THE EMAIL

"Connor, not sure how to volunteer my services to you," the message from Hanks read in 2021, "but joining you on your podcast would be a pleasure. Tom." Ratliff, fearing it was fake, got mutual friend Ben Schwartz to verify it for him. He was elated.

THE MEETING

Ratliff set up the interview in LA, and Hanks didn't disappoint."He wasn't in damage-control mode," says Ratliff. "He was genuinely interacting with the spirit of the podcast." He points out Hanks was never the villain, and that the A-lister was mortified to learn of the impact his words had on Ratliff. Even so, "I have a feeling this was a positive experience for him, as well as for me." From a long-ago sacking came audio gold. **DAN JOLIN**

***DEAD EYES*: SEASONS 1-3 ARE OUT NOW**

Getty Images, Marvel, Mindy Tucker, Marco Vitturr



BLACK IN FOCUS

AMON WARMANN chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month

WITH IRONHEART, IRON MAN'S MANTLE IS IN GOOD HANDS

AVENGERS: ENDGAME LEFT some mighty big shoes to fill. Not only was the MCU left reeling from Steve Rogers' retirement, but Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark made the ultimate sacrifice. Thankfully, Sam Wilson stepped up and accepted the role of Captain America in *The Falcon And The Winter Soldier*. And now, Dominique Thorne's Riri Williams is poised to continue the legacy of Iron Man in both *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* and her own series as introverted tech-whizz Ironheart, while bringing some much-needed Black-girl magic to the MCU in the process.

A child super-genius who made her comics debut in 2016's *The Invincible Iron Man #7*, Williams quickly made an impression on both Stark and readers with a suit of armour cobbled together from anything she could find on the MIT campus. But while she shares the Avenger's intelligence and fashion sense, there's plenty that sets her apart.

For one thing, Williams doesn't have Stark's privilege or wealth: the Chicago native made it into MIT on an engineering scholarship. While Stark started a warmonger who had to survive a trial by fire before becoming a better man, Riri's call to heroism in the comics is purer, transpiring when her stepfather and best friend Natalie are gunned down in a drive-by shooting.

Their personalities are different, too: Stark is a narcissistic extrovert, while Williams is so wrapped up in her work that she sometimes forgets to enjoy other aspects of life. The introduction of Natalie (who will be played by *This Is Us*' Lyric Ross in *Ironheart*) would help change that, as would Riri's integration into the superhero community. It'll be up to Thorne — who was notably cast with no audition — to embody Riri's fire, curiosity and smarts, all qualities glimpsed in her performances in *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Judas And The Black Messiah*.

Just as *Captain America: Civil War* gave T'Challa a memorable introduction before *Black Panther*, so too can *Wakanda Forever* be a boon for *Ironheart*. The final scene of Ryan Coogler's 2018 movie teased Wakanda's international outreach programmes — including a "science and information exchange" spearheaded by T'Challa's sister Shuri (Letitia Wright) — and it would make sense for an eager-to-learn Riri to be a beneficiary of that initiative. Indeed, this could be the start of a beautiful friendship, and the prospect of two super-smart Black women teaming up is tantalising. In any case, a bright future awaits. **AMON WARMANN**



Girl power: Riri Williams aka Ironheart — played by Dominique Thorne — gets her own series *and* an appearance in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*.

CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

FRUITVALE STATION (2013)

Ryan Coogler's theatrical debut is a hard-hitting drama that recreates the final hours of Oscar Grant's life. Moving and intimate without being hagiographic, with a knockout performance from Michael B. Jordan.





No./12

How to make your hitman a hit

BARRY star/co-creator Bill Hader on what he's learned (or not) from playing an assassin

BILL HADER ISN'T a hitman. He just plays one on TV. Which is probably a good thing, as it turns out that the co-creator/star of the dark and violent *Barry*, which has earned him two Emmys, wouldn't last five minutes as a gun-for-hire. "I'm worthless," he laughs. "If you saw me exercise, it's like, 'I'm 43, it's officially just Dad exercises.'"

Still, as Barry, an expert assassin who finds a new home among an amateur acting troupe, he's acquired a particular set of skills. Or, at least, the ability to fake them, as he tells us on the cusp of the show's third season.

SHOOTING

Barry is an ex-Marine who constantly finds his attempts to carve out a new life as a thespian compromised by the odd murderous rampage. Barry never misses, unlike gun-hating Hader. "I show up on set and a guy does this [*mimes shooting quickly*], and I go, 'Alright,'" he explains. "I've seen those videos of Keanu Reeves shooting shit. Not only can I not do it, I would be very anxious."

FIGHTING

Barry's lethal physicality was most obviously on display in the bravura Season 2 episode (directed by Hader) 'ronny/lily', in which Barry found himself in a protracted life-and-death struggle with a mysterious stranger played by Daniel Bernhardt. "I thought it would be interesting to watch two people fight and it not be a Jackie Chan thing. I wanted to design it in a way where the camera's kind of judging it. 'Stop it, what the fuck are you guys doing?'"







Top to bottom: Bill Hader as the titular assassin in *Barry*; Sarah Goldberg as Sally Reed; Henry Winkler as Gene Cousineau; Preparing for another 'hit'.

MINDSET

Barry begins with its protagonist killing for cash, but Hader has always been more concerned with showing the ramifications of his character's life as an ex-Marine, psychologically scarred by his service. "It was more [about] the overall loneliness of this particular guy, as opposed to something I had read about actual hitmen," he says. "He's a lonely guy searching for some sort of emotion."

ACTING

That search is what leads Barry to try out at an acting class run by Henry Winkler's Gene. There, Barry finds his special purpose: he's actually pretty good at this acting gig. "Well, he has to kill somebody and then feel terrible about it, and then he's great," says Hader. So, if he hasn't learned much about being a hitman, has writing and playing Barry taught him anything about acting? "I don't know that it's helped me at all," he laughs. There is one thing, though. "Actors are nuts. All nuts! I'm right there with them. We're all crazy." **CHRIS HEWITT**

BARRY: SEASON 3 IS ON SKY COMEDY AND NOW FROM 25 APRIL

No./13 NEXT IN THE SERIES



You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Don't despair — Boyd Hilton recommends the sibling shows to watch next

IF YOU LOVED... WECRASHED



THE DROPOUT

(DISNEY+)

In the avalanche of recent TV dramas telling the extraordinary true stories of grifters and scammers, *The Dropout* stands out. Like *WeCrashed*, which charts the rise and demise of WeWork co-founder Adam Neumann (played by Jared Leto), it explores the personality of an entrepreneur with way too much faith in their own expertise and abilities. Amanda Seyfried plays this particular charlatan, Elizabeth Holmes, the founder of Theranos, whose seemingly ingenious new tech promised huge medical advances but was, in fact, useless. Seyfried is phenomenal and the intricate storytelling works beautifully.



JOE VS. CAROLE

(PEACOCK)

At one point it seemed like we were going to have multiple TV and film versions of *Tiger King*, the original Netflix documentary series exposing the antics of big-cat obsessive and convicted criminal Joe Exotic. But in the end, we only have this one, and with eight hours of it, that seems enough. Credit to the producers and writers, though, for focusing as much on Carole Baskin (Kate McKinnon), target of Joe's wrath, as they do on Exotic himself. Like *WeCrashed*, it's a wryly funny take on outrageous events, with a perfect turn from John Cameron Mitchell as Joe.



HELLO LADIES

(SKY ON DEMAND/NOW)

Showrunner Lee Eisenberg brings his sharp eye and ear for comedy to many key sequences in *WeCrashed*, and it's no surprise, because he has a storied career in American sitcom-land, including stints on *The Office* (US version) and this under-valued Stephen Merchant series for HBO, which Eisenberg co-created. *Hello Ladies* follows the romantic misadventures of a super-nerdy, super-tall English ex-pat in LA, and is so close to the bone, it often feels like a documentary.



DIRTY JOHN

(NETFLIX)

By far one of the more disturbing entries in the canon of true-crime dramas based on podcasts about ruthless con artists, *Dirty John* is an account of how John Meehan (Eric Bana) wheedled his way into the lives of many women, but focuses primarily on his relationship with wealthy interior designer Debra Newell (Connie Britton). Bana switches from charming to creepy with consummate ease, while Britton shows how even the most sophisticated person can be groomed by an expert manipulator. **BOYD HILTON**

WECRASHED IS ON APPLE TV+ NOW

No./14 Who's the next rogue to escape the gallery?

With the Joker seemingly sidelined for *The Batman 2*, we line up his worthy alternatives



HUSH

Fans have already spotted "Hush" written in one of The Riddler's videos, a hint that the bandage-clad plastic surgeon may be headed for the sequel to *The Batman*. Past storylines have seen the Riddler paired up with Hush or revealed to be Hush himself, so we may meet him soon (if we haven't met him already...)



POISON IVY

It's been 25 years since Uma Thurman's Dr. Pamela Isley bestowed her venomous lips upon Gotham, and whereas Poison Ivy has been revived in The CW's *Batwoman* series (played by Nicole Kang), now could be the time for the character to bring her botanical strand of eco-terrorism back to the big screen.



MR. FREEZE

Sure, Arnold Schwarzenegger's big, beefy human popsicle was the cherry on top of *Batman & Robin*'s nightmare sundae, but Matt Reeves has hinted that he is entertaining the idea of a more sinister and subdued iteration of the character, who built a criminal empire in a bid to save his terminally ill wife.



EGGHEAD

Nicolas Cage recently volunteered to play the hardboiled villain, originally portrayed by Vincent Price in the '60s *Batman* series. With his exaggerated head and egg-shaped weapons, this could be the perfect match for the eccentric star. Two spin-offs are rumoured: 'Gone In Sixty Seggonds' and 'Mooncluck'. **BETH WEBB**

DC

No./15

"I learned a lot from Michael Keaton about taking chances"

[THE Q&A] ANDIE MACDOWELL has paid her dues as an onscreen American sweetheart, and is looking to cause some mischief

ROMANTIC COMEDIES MAY have been her bread and butter, but Andie MacDowell has never settled for being a mere love interest. Whether she was going toe-to-toe with Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day* or running circles around a bumbling Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings And A Funeral*, the actor spent her early career giving charismatic leading men a run for their money. And today, MacDowell is focused on a bolder type of role. As the straight-talking academic in Netflix's *Along For The Ride*, or the difficult onscreen mother to her real-life daughter in *Maid*, she's proving once again that she's not afraid of a challenge.



You play a Mensa-level scholar in *Along For The Ride*. What drew you to the role?
I like doing romantic comedies, and it's been a while since I've done something sweet like that, even though my character is not sweet at all. Plus, I've worked with Dermot Mulroney before in [1994 Western] *Bad Girls*, and hadn't seen him in such a long time.

And you're Paula, a nightmarish mother to your real-life daughter Margaret Qualley, in *Maid*. How did you approach the part?
Paula is someone that you know. She's one of those people that you love, despite the fact that she's horrible, because she's the life of the party. She's irresistible. There's a scene where Alex [Qualley] and I go into a bank, and Paula's flirting with the clerk, and touching his knees. All the inappropriate behaviour that I got to do was so much fun.

What was it like to play that kind of character alongside Margaret?
The weird thing is, she knew I could do it. That's what's really scary. I feel like everybody else has this vision of me that isn't me. They watch *Groundhog Day* and go, "That's the person in *Groundhog Day*." When I did *Sex, Lies, And Videotape*, people thought I was that character. Wow, I was not that character. But my daughter knew that I could do it because she knows I have all kinds of people inside of me.



From top: Andie MacDowell, ready for her next challenge; With Emma Pasarow in *Along For The Ride*.

Would you ever want to play a proper, full-on villain?
I'm working on something right now that's not announced, that is a completely different character. I think that it's probably helped [playing similar parts] in *Maid* and [survival horror] *Ready Or Not*.

Your early career saw you holding your own against your onscreen male counterparts. What was the key to doing that?
It's like going to battle. I know that sounds crazy, but it's a very specific sort of work. It's timing. It's how you say something, it's movements. It's a very special language, comedy. I remember [recently] doing one scene with Greg Davies [on *Cuckoo*], and he was like, "This isn't working." I remember diving in as deep as I could into whatever gifts I might have, and I did it, because I was gonna make the damn scene work.

Do you have a soft spot for one particular film that you've starred in?
Multiplicity. It was great, and Michael Keaton is brilliant in it. It should have been equally as successful as *Groundhog Day*. The people who did see it, loved it. It was ahead of its time. They used brand-new technology, as Michael plays four characters.

Keaton has spoken very highly about your time together on that film. Do you still speak?
He interviewed me recently about *Maid*. I learned a lot from Michael about taking chances, and playing a character that's bigger than life.

How do you feel about watching your own work at this stage in your career?
I do watch it, but not over and over again. I think when I know something is probably going to be shit, I don't particularly look forward to watching that. But if I think something went well, I don't mind watching it. I'm pretty honest with myself. I know when something's just shit. CATHERINE BRAY

ALONG FOR THE RIDE IS ON NETFLIX FROM 22 APRIL

Greg Williams/August

No./16 The bat mitzvah movie with a heart of gold

Cha Cha Real Smooth's Cooper Raiff finds joy in Jewish tradition



Here: Writer/director Cooper Raiff as party starter Andrew with college pal Macy (Odeya Rush).





From far left: "Are we there yet?" Andrew with his mother (Leslie Mann) and stepfather Greg (Brad Garrett); Domino (Dakota Johnson) and her autistic daughter Lola (Vanessa Burghardt).

COOPER RAIFF IS on a one-man mission. "I want to make movies that make people feel really good," says the writer, director and star of *Cha Cha Real Smooth*, an emotionally rich indie film about a 22-year-old college graduate who takes up a side-hustle as a bat mitzvah hype man. The Sundance-winner is Raiff's second film, after his equally tender (if rudely named) college-set debut *Shithouse*. "The idea came to me while I was watching *Wedding Crashers*," he says of *Cha Cha Real Smooth*'s party premise. "And then the school that I went to was 50 per cent Jewish. My seventh-grade year was defined by going to bat mitzvahs every weekend." It's here, amidst the torahs and the trap music, that Raiff's aimless Andrew forges a connection with Dakota Johnson's Domino and her autistic daughter Lola. "This is really a love letter to parents of disabled kids," he explains.

As with *Shithouse*, the filmmaker goes to lengths to show the best in all of his characters, even in bad situations. "I always really love each character that I'm writing, and ultimately I want everyone else to love them," he says earnestly. And the key to unlocking that feeling? Showing those people at their most messy. "You can't really love someone unless you see them as fully formed, and not just full of shit. They have a lot going on, but they're these battered optimists."

For some, the idea of getting a room full of people into the party spirit is hell on Earth. Including Raiff. "I would be the worst party starter in the world," he laughs. "I'm very introverted, and I slept very well at the end of every day of filming. But it's actually just like directing; you're trying to keep people pumped and excited to be on camera." With the film scoring the biggest sale out of Sundance (the film went to Apple to the tune of $15 million), Raiff's filmmaking career is on the rise, and though the project he's currently developing is "a bit violent and aggressive", the same unshakeable mission still lies at the heart of his work. "You're gritting your teeth for 100 minutes, but you're still rooting for the people in this film," he says. It sounds like a battered optimist trilogy may be on the cards. **BETH WEBB**

CHA CHA REAL SMOOTH IS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 17 JUNE

[TREND REPORT]

No./17 MANIMALS

These primal characters are taking a walk on the wild side



ROBERT PATTINSON
THE BATMAN

As Bruce Wayne, R-Patz spends his time solving riddles, blasting Nirvana and forgetting to wear shirts. As the Caped Crusader however, his bat-based skillset turns him into vengeance personified.



ALEXANDER SKARSGARD
THE NORTHMAN

Skarsgård's Amleth is known as an "úlfheðnar berserker", a warrior who believes he's a wolf before entering into battle. Side effects include tearing out throats with your teeth, and furballs.



RINTRAH
DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS

Marvel comics fans view this magical minotaur as an alien ally to the Sorcerer Supreme (he was once his apprentice). He also looks a good substitute for those poor Gamorrean guards from *Boba Fett*.

WORDS **BETH WEBB**
ILLUSTRATIONS **BILL McCONKEY**



No./18

The return of Mike Myers (and Mike Myers) (and Mike Myers)

The comedy legend tells *Empire* about his multi-character comeback

MIKE MYERS HAS been thinking about *The Pentaverate* — the secret society that forms the backbone of his brand-new, six-part Netflix comedy series of the same name — for a long time. How long, exactly? Well, in Myers' 1993 comedy *So I Married An Axe Murderer*, his conspiracy-theory-obsessed Scot, Stuart McKenzie, embarks on a rant that contains some very pertinent information. "It's a well-known fact, Sonny Jim, that there's a secret society of the five wealthiest people in the world, known as the Pentaverate," says Stuart, "who run everything in the world, including the newspapers, and meet tri-annually at a secret country mansion in Colorado."

So, a long time, then. "It's been in my mind for forever and forever," confirms Myers, talking to *Empire* not from a secret country mansion in Colorado, but his home in New York. "I'm obsessed with the world of secret societies, and the people that believe them. And I thought, 'Well, if there are secret societies, to turn it on its











Clockwise from far left: Mike Myers as journalist Ken Scarborough; As far-right radio host Rex Smith; Jennifer Saunders in full regalia as a member of the secret society; Myers as Scarborough (left) and conspiracy theorist Anthony Landsdowne (right), flanking Lydia West as Ken's colleague, Reilly Clayton; On The Pentaverate's trail.

head, what if they were nice?'" That idea stems very much from Myers' Canadian heritage. "I grew up in a country with a very functional government, and I'm talking about governance, which is to say government as a means of a level playing field, and this is my way of talking about that, and done in a silly comedy, which I love."

In *So I Married An Axe Murderer* (to which, incidentally, *The Pentaverate* seems to have no official connection), Stuart posited that the society's members included "the Queen, the Vatican, Gettys, the Rothschilds... and Colonel Sanders before he went tits-up". In the show, that line-up is very different, and while it has a sensational cast including Keegan-Michael Key, Ken Jeong, Jeremy Irons and Jennifer Saunders, most of the Pentaverate's members are played by Myers himself. In fact, this time around he tackles eight separate roles. "Eight characters is not that much more difficult than four characters, really," he says. "What I wanted was that each of the characters have their own unique silhouette. It was really a game of Mr. Potato Head. What looks can I do that separate each of the characters?"

We seem set to see Myers play a Russian oligarch (timely), a tech genius, a far-right radio host, a conspiracy theorist and a media mogul, but the central character is Ken Scarborough, a Canadian journalist who stumbles upon the Pentaverate's existence. "He's very local news, 'Here we are at the county fair', one of those guys," says Myers. "He's getting older, and he has to break a big story, and the question is, will he expose the Pentaverate?"

Since *The Love Guru* came out in 2009, Myers has largely contented himself with passion projects like his documentary *Supermensch*, about Hollywood insider Shep Gordon, or mad side gigs like hosting *The Gong Show* entirely in character as a British comedian called Tommy Maitland. All the while, though, *The Pentaverate* started to take on a life of its own. "I wanted to do a comedy that was going to have a lot of style, and I wanted it to be cinematic," he explains. "I've really enjoyed limited series and what can only be described as 'Streamingwood'. I looked around and I talked to Netflix, and they were fantastically supportive."

And it seems that Myers isn't purely focused on the gags this time around. He has something to say about conspiracy theories, about power, and about the limits of what people will believe. "I dare not touch the hem of the garment of the film that I'm about to speak of, but at the end of the day, *[Dr.] Strangelove* is a multiple-character farce, and to me that's the highest aspiration," he says. "There's a way to travel deep and silly at the same time." All aboard. A secret country mansion — possibly in Colorado — awaits. **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE PENTAVERATE IS ON NETFLIX FROM 5 MAY





Clockwise from left: Caleb Landry Jones; A fiery scene; Judy Davis and Anthony LaPaglia play the killer's parents; Director Justin Kurzel.

No./19 Tackling a taboo tragedy

Through NITRAM, Justin Kurzel explores the historic Port Arthur massacre

JUSTIN KURZEL HAS spent his career trying to understand violence. Since *Snowtown*, his 2011 debut about a real-life series of murders in 1980s Adelaide, Kurzel's films — *Macbeth*, *Assassin's Creed*, and most recently *The True History Of The Kelly Gang* — have all explored how men become killers and how killing becomes mundane. His latest may not be his most violent (most of the killing happens off-screen), but it is his most complex and incendiary.

Nitram is another true story, based on the life of Martin Bryant, a young, intellectually disabled man who murdered 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1996. It was the most shocking mass murder in modern Australian history. "There are many people who feel this shouldn't have been made," says Kurzel, who is from Tasmania. "But it was one of the best scripts I'd ever read [by regular collaborator Shaun Grant]. I genuinely believed it was trying to say something."

Although "very worried about how people would respond", Kurzel felt the film had important points to make about gun violence and how easily it happens. "It's walking in the footsteps of someone that came from an ordinary family who then turned and became really dangerous," he says. "There's an absurdity and horror that really spoke to me." Much of the public debate around the film was about how he'd show the killings, but pointedly, Kurzel left the massacre itself out of the film entirely. His focus instead was on the man who committed the crime.

Kurzel cast Caleb Landry Jones in the role of Bryant. "He just had the most sophisticated thoughts about the script," he says, and points out that Landry Jones, who grew up in Texas, USA, "was around guns all the time, so there was a different relationship with them", which brought another dimension to his performance. The final film has been polarising, with Landry Jones winning Best Actor at Cannes, while some audiences have voiced anger in Australia. "I knew it would be [controversial], but what surprised me was the number of people who did see it in Australia and weren't aware of the events in the film. In Tasmania, it's really hard to talk about the massacre. It's taboo. So I did feel the film was opening up a conversation."

Kurzel calls *Nitram* the third part in a trilogy, after *Snowtown* and *Kelly Gang*, about "violence in young men", although focusing on aggressive themes was never something he and Grant intended. "It sort of crept up on us as something we've been subconsciously drawn to. I started my career doing commercials, and most of them were comedies," says Kurzel, who plans to leave violence behind for his next project. "I'm really moved by different things. I'm actually looking at a couple of beautiful love stories." Time for love over hate... **OLLY RICHARDS**

NITRAM IS IN CINEMAS FROM 1 JULY



SMALL TALK

JAMIE LEE CURTIS

Hello, Jamie. How are you?
Hi! I'm very well. I'm filming the last in the trilogy of the *Halloween* movies and we're on night shoots, so I'm *assuming* it's Sunday.

Where are you right now?
Savannah, Georgia. In a lovely, perfectly comfortable hotel, drinking maybe my third coffee.

You're on to a good start. Do you tend to surrender to the roles you're playing?
You have to. It's like jazz. All of a sudden you're doing a whole other scene to what was really written, and you just know your part.

What's your read on people?
People are actually quite wonderful, and creative people are spectacular, but there can be some complete cunts in the world. I say that with a little 'c'. Or maybe with a 'k', and then everybody won't, like, cancel me.

You star with Michelle Yeoh in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. Was she why you came on board?
I think her magical blend of exquisite beauty — and I mean fucking cray cray beauty — and her fucking whip talent as a martial artist are just thrilling to watch. They say, "They had me at hello." Well, they had me at Michelle Yeoh.
JOHN NUGENT

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE IS OUT LATER THIS YEAR

Alamy, Capital Pictures, Getty Images



No./20 Tom Cruise isn't done chasing highs yet

Christopher McQuarrie on the star's latest skybound stunt for Mission: Impossible 8

AFTER TOM CRUISE secured himself to the side of a plane as it took off for *Mission: Impossible — Rogue Nation*, and after he spent much of the making of *Top Gun: Maverick* hurtling around inside one, you'd think he and Christopher McQuarrie would have had it up to here with planes. Thankfully, as the star/director turn their attention to shooting *Mission: Impossible 8* on location in South Africa, that doesn't seem to be the case. "We're shooting this aerial sequence that's pretty spectacular," confirms McQuarrie, who has taken time out from behind the camera to offer *Empire* an update on the shoot. The sequence in question involves Cruise climbing out onto the wing of a bright yellow World War II biplane, before hanging upside-down.

Cruise initially rehearsed the stunt in Cambridge before heading to South Africa to shoot. "It's like *Dick Tracy*; it's all primary colours," explains McQuarrie of the sequence, which involves multiple aircraft. "One plane is yellow, one plane is red. Africa is green, because it's [the] raining season, and the sky is unbelievably blue. I've never shot anything like it."

Of course, you may have figured out by now that *Mission: Impossible 7* still isn't with us. That movie has been delayed until 2023, giving McQuarrie and Cruise a chance to get a head-start on the eighth instalment. "There are parts of *7* we have yet to shoot," chuckles McQuarrie. It turns out that the claim that they had completed principal photography "wasn't accurate".

"There are no accurate terms for what we've been going through," he explains. "There's not a model for this anywhere. Every day you're making both movies. There's a scene I wrote in *8* and realised, 'Wow, this would be better if we set this stuff in *7*.' So I was working on *8* in the morning and then found out I'd been working on *7* all day."

After the twin triumphs of *Rogue Nation* and *Fallout*, the two previous McQuarrie-directed episodes of the *Mission* series, all eyes are on this double whammy, to see how effectively the stakes can be raised. It's already been well-documented that day one on *Mission 7* involved Cruise driving a bike off a cliff. As a wise man once said, you ain't seen nothing yet. Maybe day one on *8* involved Cruise flying a plane off a cliff and landing on a bike. Impossibler things have happened. **CHRIS HEWITT**

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 7 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 14 JULY 2023.
MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 8 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 JUNE 2024.

PILOT TV

podcast

TV news and reviews every Monday



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PINT OF MILK

JOSH BROLIN

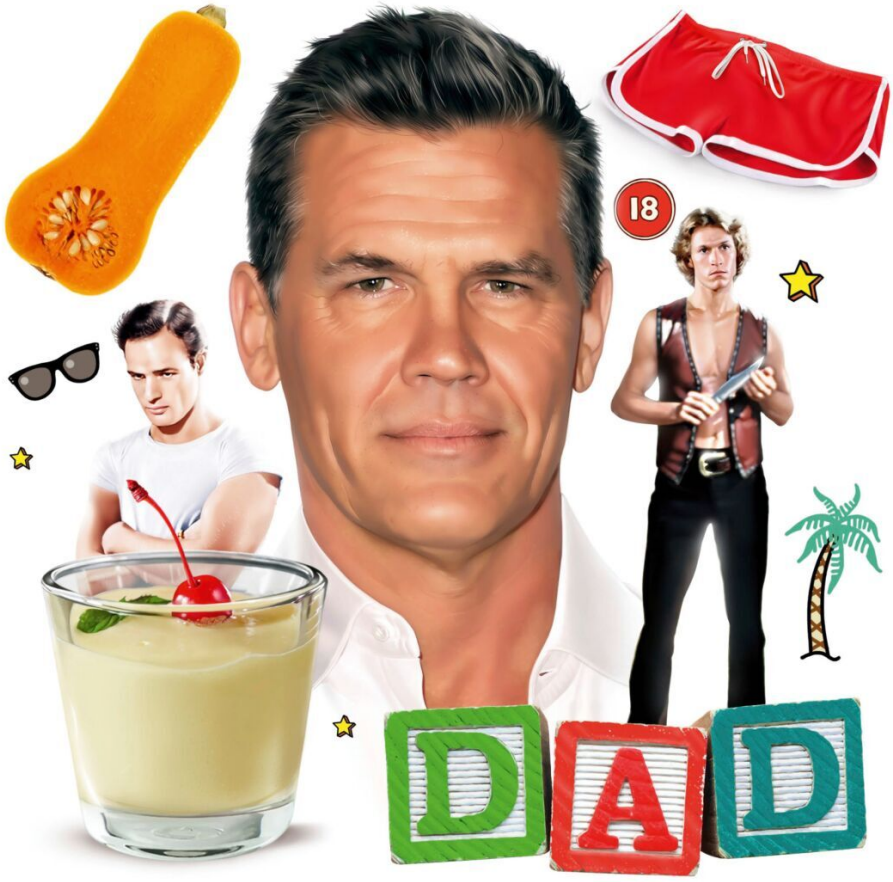


ILLUSTRATION **ARNO**

How much is a pint of milk?
I've regressed. I knew how much a pint of milk cost when I was drinking a gallon of milk a day. Where am I? In Los Angeles? One hundred and 19 dollars. I think that might be accurate. It sounds like a joke, but I think it might be accurate.

Do you have a nickname?
When I was a kid, and which I never understood and still don't, my dad called me 'Squash'. I guess because it rhymes with Josh? It's like a non-nickname. It's the opposite of a nickname. It didn't create a lot of confidence as a kid.

Do you have a signature dish?
I was a cook at a place called Rocky Galentis on the Lower State Street in Santa Barbara, from [age] 12 to 15. And I became head pasta cook there, and I made an amazing *zabaglione*, a custard dessert. The timing of it is everything. I have a *zabaglione* bowl at home that I still bring out once in a while. I think when you're a kid and you masturbate a lot, it's easier to do a *zabaglione* because you can whip the whisk really fast. When you're 54, like I am now, it's harder to do that.

When have you been most starstruck in your life?
I was asked by somebody — I won't tell you who — to join them for dinner, and Marlon Brando came to that dinner. I'm not a quiet guy, and I don't know if I said one word. I literally didn't know what to say. You would think I became an actor because my dad was an actor, but it was really when I saw *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *East Of Eden*. Marlon Brando and James Dean. I was dumbstruck. I had never seen acting like it, at least at that point. And so that night with Brando was very, very, very special.

What one thing do you do better than anyone else?
Fuck up interviews.

Which film have you seen the most?
The Warriors. I've seen it 66 times. I saw it 65 times on VHS, and one time in the theatre at the Drafthouse in Austin. I still know every word.

Do you have a favourite joke?
No. It's the absurdity of what I'm experiencing every day that I find very, very funny.

What's in your pocket right now?
I'm going silent for a second, let your imagination go crazy. I have shorts on and there's zero in my pockets. I have a pocketful of air.

COMING SOON

DUNE PART 2
(2023)
Brolin has confirmed to *Empire* that he will return as seasoned warmaster Gurney Halleck in the sequel to Denis Villeneuve's epic Oscar-winner, which is gearing up to shoot this summer.

BROTHERS
(DATE TBC)
Palm Springs director Max Barbakow helms this fraternal film, which will see Brolin star alongside Peter Dinklage as unlikely siblings. Glenn Close and Brendan Fraser are also on board.

What scares you?
Not parenting well. That scares me, because I'm crazy about my children. I have a 33-year-old, a 28-year-old, a three-year-old and a one-year-old. Basically, my entire adult life has been about parenting. And what scares me is the idea of not living, this gift that we've been given, to its fullest extent. That terrifies me, actually.

When were you last naked outdoors?
Two weeks ago, on my roof. I was arrested for it, and I only spent three-and-a-half hours in jail. No, I'm kidding. I'm the one interviewee where you actually thought, "He did go to jail!" But it was two weeks ago. I went up there to watch the sunset real quick and then I did something funny for my wife. She thought it was funny.

What would be the title of your autobiography?
'This Wig, That Wig'.

What poster did you have on your wall as a kid?
Farrah Fawcett, with the skateboard and the feathered hair. It was weird, because my mom grew up with Farrah in Corpus Christi, Texas. I remember there was always a strange look when she would walk into my room. I thought it was me, and then later I realised it was the poster.

CHRIS HEWITT

OUTER RANGE IS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 15 APRIL

ON SCREEN

15 APR–8 MAY

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



[FILM]

THE NORTHMAN

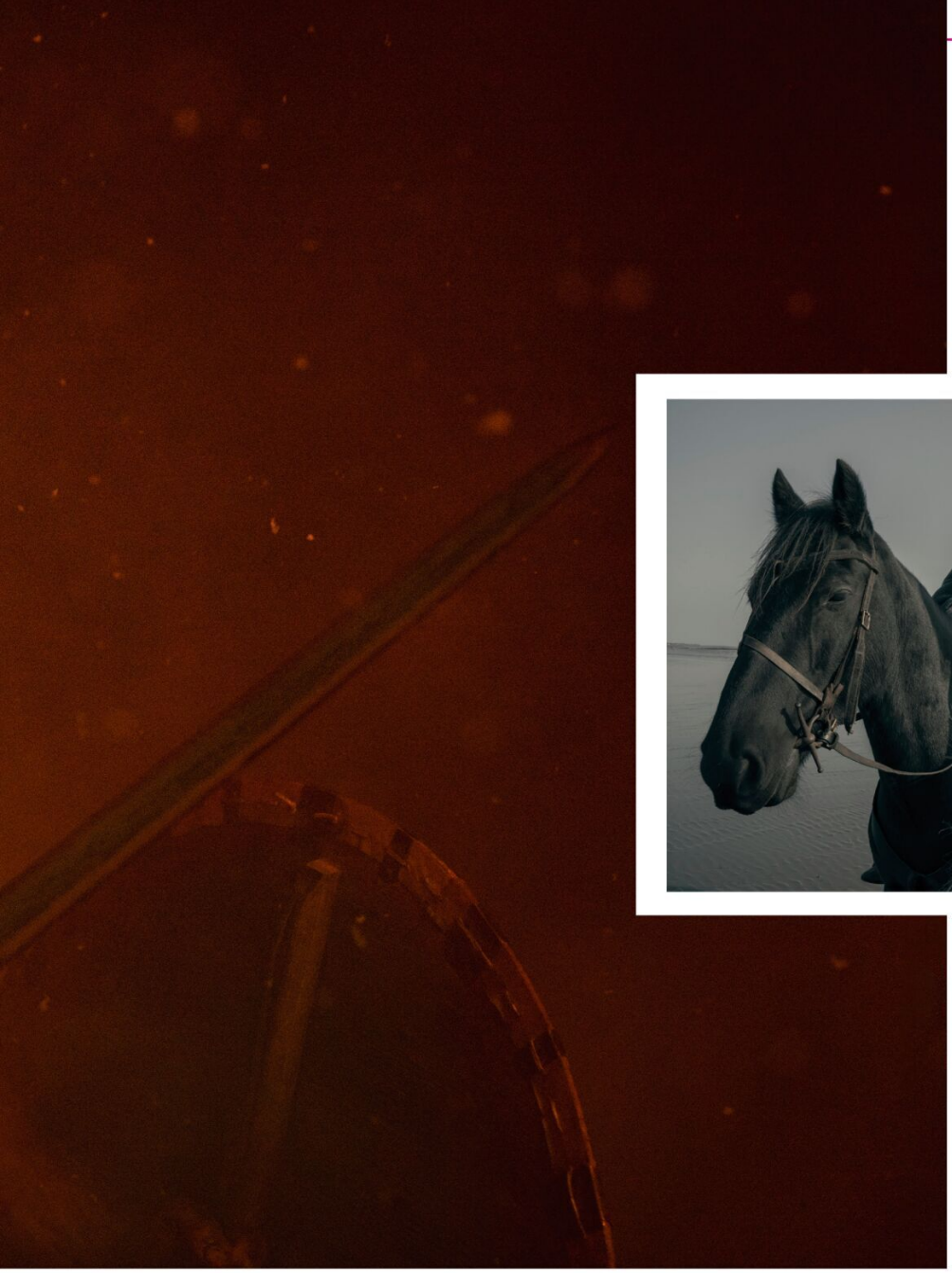
★★★★★ | OUT **15 APRIL** / CERT **TBC** / **136 MINS**

DIRECTOR Robert Eggers
CAST Alexander Skarsgård, Nicole Kidman, Claes Bang, Anya Taylor-Joy, Ethan Hawke, Björk, Willem Dafoe

PLOT At the turn of the tenth century, a Nordic prince-turned-brutal-warrior named Amleth (Skarsgård) seeks bloody vengeance against the man responsible for the murder of his father (Hawke), and receives supernatural guidance along the way.

NO FILMMAKER IN the last 20 years has done folklore quite like Robert Eggers. *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* showcased his skilful ability to transpose the stories of old into celluloid form, without losing the historical, mystical and cultural veracity of their origin, and both have been weird and wacky gifts to behold. Yet these intimate portraits of North American myth are a whole different ballgame compared to the Viking legend of Eggers' latest cinematic endeavour. To say he's stepped it up a notch would be an understatement — the man's smashed it right out of the park.

In an ambitious exploration of Nordic mythology, various gods are worshipped — anyone familiar with Marvel's take on the *Thor* franchise will recognise names such as Odin or Freyja — but this is very much the brutal story of man. One man, in particular: Prince Amleth, a beast of a warrior played with feral intensity by Alexander Skarsgård. He stalks across the





Left: "Played with feral intensity" — Alexander Skarsgård pulls out all the stops as Viking warrior Amleth. **Below:** Olga of the Birch Forest (Anya Taylor-Joy) joins Amleth on his quest for vengeance.

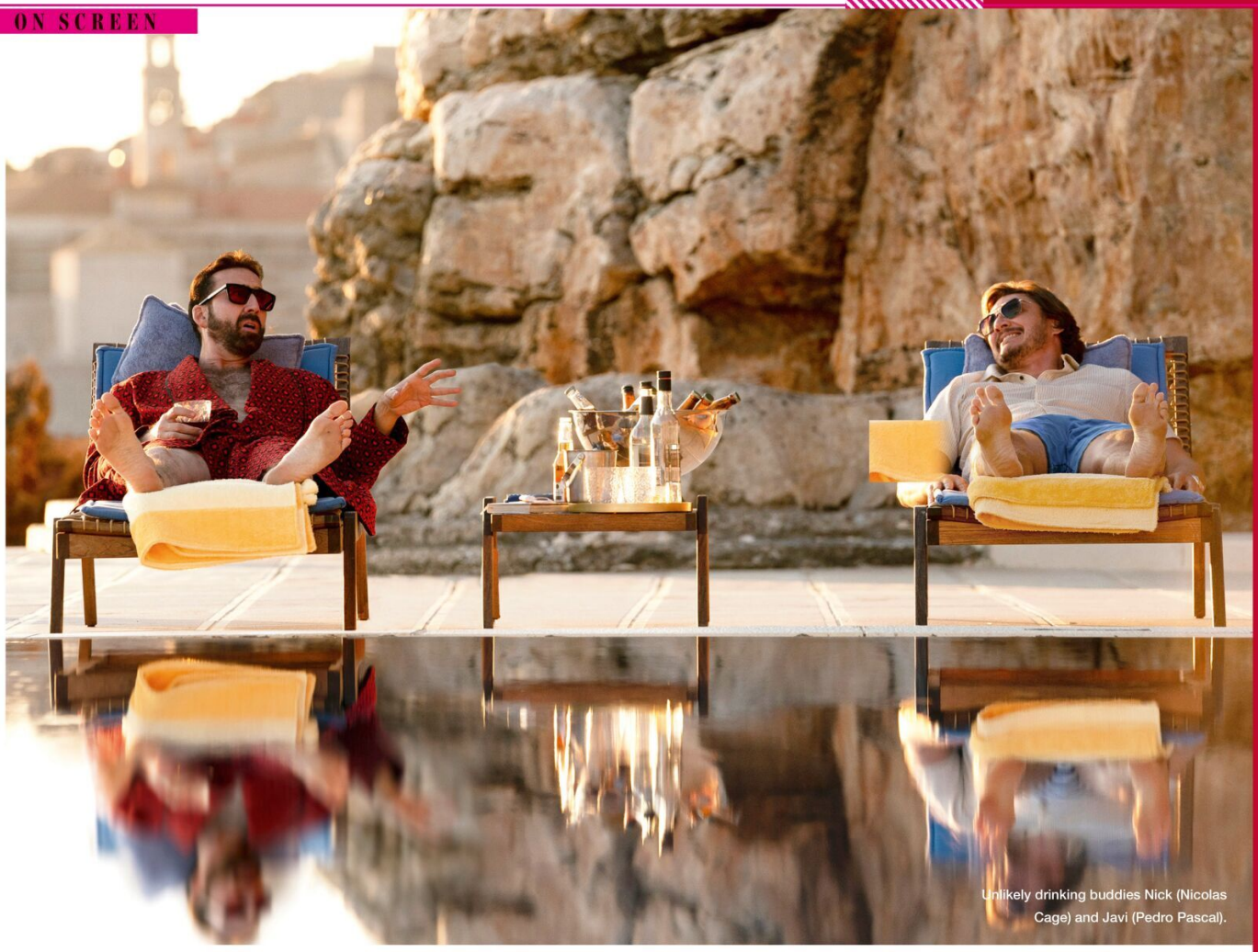
screen, shoulders hunched forward and carrying the weight of every kill he's committed since fleeing his home as a cub after witnessing the murder of his father, King Aurvandil (Ethan Hawke), by his uncle Fjölnir (Claes Bang), in a power move to take over their kingdom in the North. If this tale feels similar to *Hamlet*, that's because Eggers and his co-writer, Icelandic poet Sjón, took inspiration from the same 12th-century Danish story as Shakespeare. But the two have expertly interwoven mystical strands of Icelandic fable into five, multilayered chapters of bombastic drama, steeped in so much familial conflict, barbaric romance and bloodthirsty violence that after two-and-a-half hours, your mind, body and soul might just need an ice bath to recover.

Each vignette of action is articulated with such high-octane precision and depth by cinematographer Jarin Blaschke that no performance is wasted. In one sequence, the camera tracks Amleth roaring into action, sprinting at an encampment as spears and arrows whip past his naked body before he launches onto its high, wooden wall, hauls himself over and, with an axe, meets the heads, necks and backs of several opponents. Later, as he prowls through the village and turns out of shot, we witness the unrelentingly cruel violence visited upon defenceless women and children, before he returns to the frame in murderous fashion. Long takes like these, accompanied by composers Robin Carolan and Sebastian Gainsborough's pulsating score, throbbing with drumbeats and low notes, emphasise the savage spectacle and unforgiving harshness of these times, but also the powerful physicality of Skarsgård.

The Swedish actor has long wanted to play a Viking, and Eggers has created the perfect environment to truly bring out the berserker within. Whether it's in the natural light against backdrops of forests, mountains, seas and rivers or behind the veil, on the rich, black-and-white plane of gods, dead kings and valkyries, Skarsgård seems possessed with Old Nordic fire, showing both melancholy and a taste for blood. It's quite unlike anything he's done before.

In such a wild historical epic, each actor, in fact, brings a willingness to throw themselves into the madness. Anya Taylor-Joy holds her own as white witch Olga of the Birch Forest, a character who is as radiant as she is resourceful, imbued with quiet confidence and emotional rigour. Hawke and Willem Dafoe — as Heimir the Fool — are riotously primeval in an early rite-of-passage scene; Björk's seeress is pure magic; and Bang brings dignity and believable lethality to his chief antagonist. Nicole Kidman, meanwhile, is positively chaotic as Amleth's queen mother, with a role that puts her son's whole worldview into question. That's the beauty of this story of heroes and villains, good and evil: it's all about perspective, and Eggers' vision of the Old World is one that closes in on the fallacies of men who are willing to kill and die for the sake of legacy, honour and tradition. He takes us on a bloody, merciless voyage across land, sea and otherworlds, culminating with a cathartic third-act battle realised in blazing glory. "Til Valhall!", indeed. **HANNA FLINT**

VERDICT **This is intimate, culturally rich storytelling on a brutally epic scale. Skarsgård is in his element, bolstered by a sensational cast throwing themselves headfirst into Eggers and Sjón's awe-inspiring vision. A cinematic saga worthy of the ancestors.**



Unlikely drinking buddies Nick (Nicolas Cage) and Javi (Pedro Pascal).

[FILM]

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT

★★★★

OUT **22 APRIL**
CERT **15** / **106 MINS**

DIRECTOR Tom Gormican
CAST Nicolas Cage, Pedro Pascal, Sharon Horgan, Tiffany Haddish, Ike Barinholtz, Paco León

PLOT Stuck in a slow career decline, actor Nick Cage (Cage) decides to retire — but not before banking $1 million for appearig at the birthday party of wealthy mega-fan Javi (Pascal). Unfortunately for the movie star, Javi is a drug lord suspected of kidnapping, and the CIA wants Cage to help.

"I'M AN ACTOR," declares Nick Cage, in the role of his lifetime, playing Nick Cage. "No! You're a fucking movie star, don't you forget this!" screams back another Cage, digitally de-aged to his youthful, *Wild At Heart* heyday as a roaring ego-phantom version of the actor (playfully credited as 'Nicky Kim Coppola'). We've seen Cage acting opposite himself before (to Oscar-nominated acclaim in *Adaptation*), and we've seen him frolicking in a meta playground, too (*Adaptation*, again). But Tom Gormican's *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent* — title of the year, no arguments — catapults it all to a whole new level.

The movie won't disappoint Cage aficionados. It opens with a clip from *Con Air*, contains tongue-in-cheek nods to *The Croods 2*, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and *Guarding Tess*, and features a scene packed with Cage-flavoured props, from *Mandy*'s chainsaw to the twin gold guns from *Face/Off*.

Cage himself has never been more game. It's one thing to eat a cockroach (as he did for *Vampire's Kiss*); it's a whole other to chew up and spit out your own career with an accepting self-awareness of every criticism levelled at you ("You seem to be working all the time," his therapist notes) and turn it into a full-blown comedy.

But what lies beyond the film's central self-efface/off conceit? You'd be forgiven for expecting a bit of an indulgent binge, with little more to offer than the first-world-problem tussle between Cage's fragile worth as an "actor" and his diminishing stature as "a movie star". However, while the overarching plot knowingly pings between the Cagey extremes of adult, character-driven drama and *cojone*-swinging action bombast, what really emerges is a surprisingly sweet and affecting buddy comedy.

The real double act here is not Nick and Nicky (in fact, Gormican wisely holds back on the showy inner dialogues), but Cage and Pascal, as two guys from very different worlds who form an improbable bond amid high-stakes circumstances. While Cage leans into his amplified, unfiltered persona ("I should always trust my shamanistic instincts as a thespian!"), Pascal nimbly balances an appealing, starry-eyed guilelessness with underlying shades of threat. They gel well, and the film is stronger when they share the frame than when it's dabbling in Clouseau-esque slapstick (Cage's first foray into spycraft) or letting the bullets fly and the cars crash.

The supporting characters are a little thinly drawn, with Sharon Horgan eye-rolling for Ireland as Nick's ex-wife and Tiffany Haddish exasperatedly instructing Cage via an earpiece. And although the story's 'neglected family' thread skirts mawkishness — yes, there's a hard-to-relate-to teenage daughter (Lily Mo Sheen) — it does land somewhere more feel-good than feel-annoyed, thanks in no small part to Gormican's evident affection for *Paddington 2* (don't ask, just watch).

It's an occasionally patchy affair, then — but given Cage's own résumé, that seems oddly appropriate. And, as we said, if you're familiar with that résumé, there's plenty here to make you go, "Whoooah!" **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT **A big, silly, scrappy bundle of fun, packed with Cage-related Easter eggs and in-jokes, but also a whole lotta heart.**



X

★★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **18** / **106 MINS**
DIRECTOR Ti West
CAST Mia Goth, Jenna Ortega, Martin Henderson, Brittany Snow, Scott Mescudi

Texas, 1979. Hustler Wayne (Martin Henderson) hires an isolated farm, intending to shoot a porn movie. Misunderstandings lead to a bloodbath. Considering that sequels to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are still being cranked out, writer-director Ti West shows guts in reframing many images from Tobe Hooper's 1974 classic early in *X*, to build background dread while the main characters think they're in a comical, down-home *Boogie Nights*. When natural and unnatural desires are awakened on the shoot, the horrors go into overdrive with eye-opening shocks and surprises. West's fright-films are playful but run to serious scares — and *X* is a properly satisfying shocker. **KN**

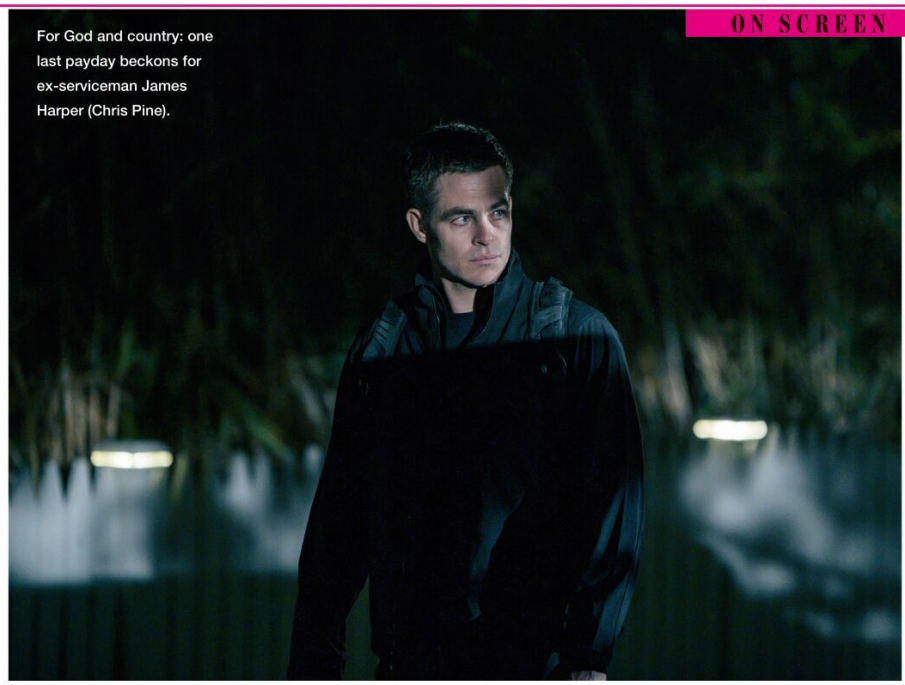


JUJUTSU KAISEN 0

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15** / **105 MINS**
DIRECTOR Seong-Hu Park
CAST (VOICES) Megumi Ogata, Chinatsu Akasaki, Aya Endô, Kana Hanazawa

Finding a happy halfway point between the non-canon, new-audience-accessible anime tie-in films and sequels demanding emotional investment like last year's *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba The Movie — Mugen Train*, *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* is for viewers new and old to enjoy. Those familiar with the TV show will find similar pleasures here, with its mix of fantasy, horror and dark emotion. The core concepts and tone remain the same too, as the film swings between scares and goofy comedy in its tale of cursed spirits and doomed love. The animation — a dazzling mix of fight choreography and magic powers defined by their own distinct textures — is a pleasure, even if the story is often frustratingly simple. **KC**



For God and country: one last payday beckons for ex-serviceman James Harper (Chris Pine).

[FILM]

THE CONTRACTOR

★★★

OUT **6 MAY (PRIME VIDEO)**
CERT **TBC** / **103 MINS**

DIRECTOR Tarik Saleh
CAST Chris Pine, Ben Foster, Gillian Jacobs, Eddie Marsan, Kiefer Sutherland

PLOT James Harper (Pine), a Special Forces sergeant in the US Army, is involuntarily discharged without benefits. Broke and suddenly unemployed, he takes a high-risk private contractor job in Germany to settle his debts. When the job doesn't go to plan, Harper is forced to take matters into his own hands.

THE CONTRACTOR WAS originally called *Violence Of Action*, which at least gave some hint of explosions or excitement. The title they ultimately settled on sounds like a film where Chris Pine plays a handyman who spends most of the running time offering quotes to sort out your extension. It comes as some relief, then, that this film, a sharp, cool-blooded thriller, is not quite as generic as that new name threatens.

The first half-hour doesn't immediately allay those fears, though, in an opening act that often feels stultified by the clichés of the territory. Sergeant James Harper (Chris Pine) is a dedicated military man in a very traditional sense: God-fearing, family-focused, plays by the rules, salutes the flag. He is also drowning in debt, and when a new commanding officer suddenly forces him out of his job, he needs work and money fast. Motivations and stakes are swiftly established: he's broke, and he has a family to feed.

So on the advice of his best friend (played by Ben Foster, joining Pine in a pleasing *Hell Or High Water* reunion), he takes on some private security contract work, not knowing its risks or details, only its massive payday. The first act lightly offers some melancholy musings on the fate of veterans, post-service; flashbacks to Harper's jingoistic military father clumsily send the point home.

Then, suddenly, it kicks into gear, a ramp up in tension and pace heralded by the arrival of the contractor-in-chief, played by Kiefer Sutherland as a kind of alt-universe Jack Bauer. Details of the mission are shady, but Harper is promised it is "strictly matters of national security", and "scalpel work". He and his team are tasked with infiltrating a Berlin lab with supposed terrorist links: get in, get out, bish-bash-bosh.

When the extrajudicial mission goes south, as it invariably must, Swedish director Tarik Saleh injects the action with Greengrass-ian pace and panache, and in fact there is more than a whiff of *Bourne* about this film: in its über-capable hero, ashen-faced tone, handheld camerawork and stinging, brutal fight scenes. The script, from J.P. Davis, doesn't pander either. Much carefully researched talk of assets and codexes fills the exposition, and there's the clear influence of '70s-era paranoia thrillers in its cynical take on establishment lies.

Pine is solid in a guarded, muscular performance, but it's a role that is more a physical challenge than a mental one: the emotional scenes are either at zero or 100, no middle ground. But he is fully convincing as a lethal, ultra-competent expert in unconventional warfare, and his character's trajectory serves as a fairly effective metaphor for the military at large: men turned into killing machines without realising the consequences to themselves or those around them. For a title as empty as *The Contractor*, you might be surprised by how much there is in the tank. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **It follows the rules of the genre as unwaveringly as its hero follows orders, but despite that, there's a tense, tightly constructed thriller here — and Chris Pine makes a decent play as a neo-Bourne.**



The stakes — or is that snakes? — are high for Benedetta (Virginie Efira).







Top to bottom: Nun on the run; Creature of habit Charlotte Rampling; Lambert Wilson's Nuncio falls from grace.

[FILM]

BENEDETTA

★★★★

OUT **15 APRIL** / CERT **TBC**
131 MINS

DIRECTOR Paul Verhoeven
CAST Virginie Efira, Daphne Patakia, Charlotte Rampling, Lambert Wilson

PLOT In 17th-century Tuscany, Benedetta (Efira) is sent to a Catholic convent, where she spends her days piously and quietly. But when an unlikely romance begins with a new recruit (Patakia), Benedetta claims she's having visions of Jesus — who wants to make her his wife.

"*SHOWGIRLS*, BUT IN a convent." That's how *Benedetta* has been sold, which really only scratches the surface of this supremely sexy, silly, strangely entertaining film from ever-indelicate satirist Paul Verhoeven. Adapted from Judith C. Brown's book, *Immodest Acts: The Life Of A Lesbian Nun In Renaissance Italy*, it has the weight of history behind it, as if to deflect against accusations of implausibility. Yes, there really were horny, mystic nuns in a 17th-century abbey, in what is supposedly the earliest written record of a lesbian relationship in the modern Western world.

So you might reasonably think it follows the 'forbidden historical romance' blueprint. Certainly, the film explores female desire in a world that denies it, helped by humane and considered performances from Virginie Efira as the title character and newcomer Daphne Patakia as her lover, with the always-dependable Charlotte Rampling eyeing them suspiciously as the sceptical, scowling Abbess.

But Verhoeven is too interesting — and too irreverent — a filmmaker to simply go down one well-trodden path. He seems fascinated by how this story intersects with sexual expression and freedom, power dynamics and gender, and the clashing of reason and faith.

It is a reckoning of religion as much as anything, and ever the provocateur, Verhoeven seems to delight in the sacrilegious. This is a film in which (within the first five minutes) the blessed Virgin Mary takes the form of a small bird who poos into someone's eye; Jesus Christ himself appears as a horseback-riding, sword-wielding hunk; and a wooden idol of the Virgin is fashioned into a makeshift dildo.

Much of this is quite straightforwardly funny, and it's hard to imagine some of the dialogue — co-written by Verhoeven and David Birke — hasn't been played for laughs. (As one church elder cries, "Lust? Between women? Impossible!") Earnest and often emotional performances from the cast keep things the right side of out-and-out comedy, but it is a satire in the most forthright terms.

While Verhoeven's last film, the Paris-set, Isabelle Huppert-starring *Elle*, was understated and arthouse-y, *Benedetta* finds the director closer to his *Basic Instinct*-era erotica comfort zone. The filmmaking here is blunt, almost tacky. Anne Dudley's score is enjoyably sweeping, though it verges on cheesy, while a CGI sky in the final act, portending divine judgement, is laughably cheap. It's an entirely European production — a Dutch director, working in the French language on a film set in Italy — but to its marrow, this is B-movie exploitation Hollywood.

Inevitably, that means not every viewer will be singing from the same hymn sheet. Some are bound to be offended; others will just find it juvenile or absurd. But true disciples will appreciate the outlandish craft and courage of Verhoeven's best film in years: a feminist allegory about a woman establishing power in a patriarchal system — through faith, love and dildos. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **A funny, filthy, iconoclastic riot. Paul Verhoeven's latest erotic satire won't be for all creeds, but it is bursting with enough ideas that even doubters can find something to believe in here.**

SHOWMASTERS

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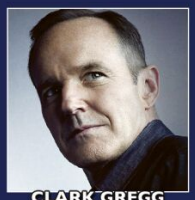
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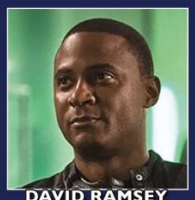
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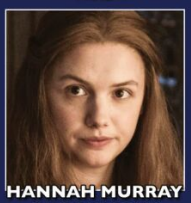
CLARK GREGG
AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D, AVENGERS



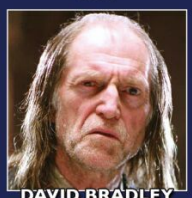
DAVID RAMSEY
ARROW



CLARE KRAMER
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HANNAH MURRAY
GAME OF THRONES



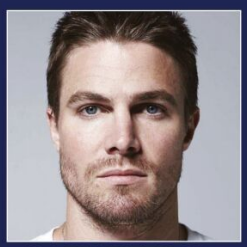
DAVID BRADLEY
HARRY POTTER, DR WHO



CHRISTOPHER LLOYD
BACK TO THE FUTURE



DORIAN KINGI
BOOK OF BOBA FETT



STEPHEN AMELL
ARROW



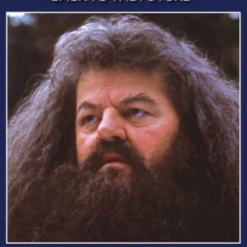
KAREN ALLEN
INDIANA JONES



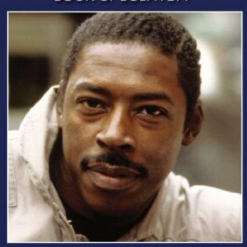
OMID ABTAHI
MANDALORIAN, AMERICAN GODS



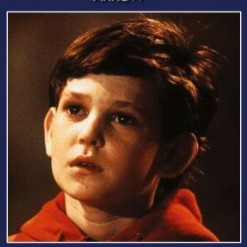
SAM HUMPHREY
THR GREATEST SHOWMAN



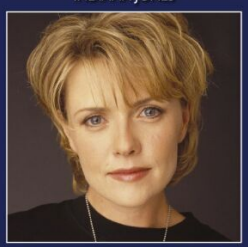
ROBBIE COLTRANE
HARRY POTTER, JAMES BOND



ERNIE HUDSON
GHOSTBUSTERS, OZ



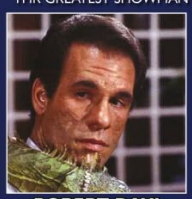
HENRY THOMAS
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AMANDA TAPPING
STARGATE, SANCTUARY

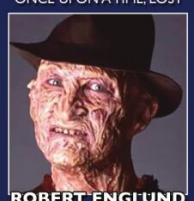


ELIZABETH MITCHELL
ONCE UPON A TIME, LOST



ROBERT DAVI
JAMES BOND

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NIGHTMARE ON ELM ST



DANIELLE NICOLET
THE FLASH



BARBARA NEDELJAKOVA
HOSTEL



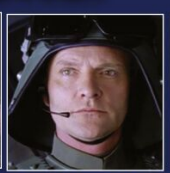
JANA KADERABKOVA
HOSTEL



ROBERT MACNAUGHTON
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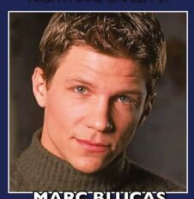
MISTY ROSAS
MANDALORIAN



JULIAN GLOVER
STAR WARS, INDY, BOND



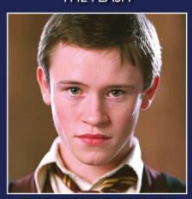
JACK MCKENZIE
STAR WARS



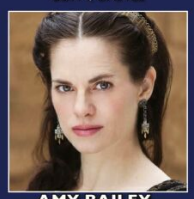
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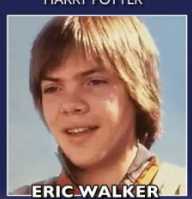


DEVON MURRAY
HARRY POTTER



AMY BAILEY
VIKINGS





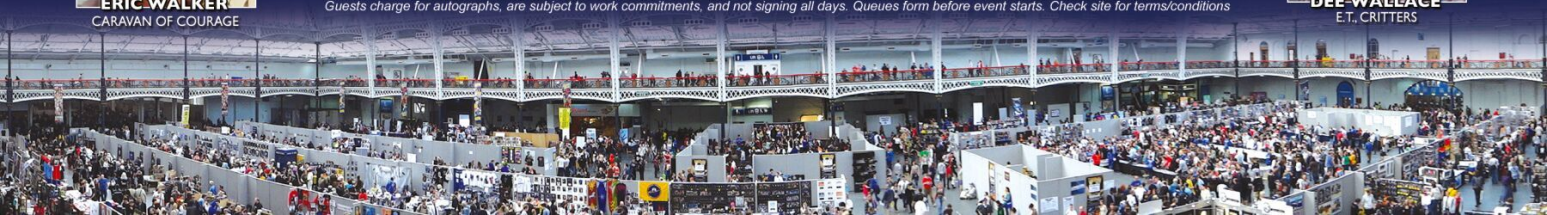
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SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **PG** / **122 MINS**
DIRECTOR Jeff Fowler
CAST Ben Schwartz, Idris Elba, Jim Carrey, James Marsden, Tika Sumpter, Colleen O'Shaughnessey

The first *Sonic The Hedgehog* film overcame initial fan backlash, mixed reviews and the video-game-to-movie curse to become the most successful film based on a video game ever. This, the beginning of a burgeoning cinematic universe, is really just more of the same: a Saturday-morning cartoon with a Hollywood budget, targeted primarily at an audience of eight-year-olds. It's still colourful and kooky, the CG character designs are still jarringly cartoonish in their live-action surroundings, and the jokes are still, on the whole, bad. The closest thing here to a saving grace is Jim Carrey, reminding us again that nobody in Hollywood can expertly gurn quite like him. It's a tantalising hint of his hyperactive '90s heyday; if only he was putting it to decent material. **JN**



PLAYGROUND

★★★★★

OUT **22 APRIL** / CERT **TBC** / **72 MINS**
DIRECTOR Laura Wandel
CAST Maya Vanderbeque, Günter Duret, Karim Leklou

It begins with a sobbing seven-year-old girl hugging her older brother before heading to school for the first time. It is the first of a few hugs in the film. Hugs so tight, so desperate, you want to cry. For this playground can be a battleground. Nora (Maya Vanderbeque) doesn't understand why her brother Abel (Günter Duret) is being bullied or why *he's* bullying other kids, her innocence being gradually corroded. Vanderbeque's performance is impossibly great, and director Laura Wandel's acutely empathetic filmmaking feels almost invisible. This is tender, sensitive, non-judgmental work, which doesn't put a foot wrong. At 72 minutes, it verges on slight — there's certainly no fat on it. Yet still, it's an emotional barrage that will bring out your most primal protective urges. **AG**



APOLLO $10\frac{1}{2}$: A SPACE AGE CHILDHOOD

★★★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)** / CERT **12A** / **97 MINS**
DIRECTOR Richard Linklater
CAST Jack Black, Glen Powell, Zachary Levi, Milo Coy, Lee Eddy

Richard Linklater has always mined his early years for cinematic treasures; this feels like his most personal film in years. Using a unique style of animation, this sweet, memoir-like film, told from the perspective of a ten-year-old in 1969, has its head in the stars but its heart on the ground. In Stanley's (Jack Black) telling, there was a secret mission, days before the Apollo 11 walk on the moon, which saw NASA recruit him, a small child, to test their equipment first. That imagined mission bookends the film, but the meat of the thing is really the director luxuriating in his memories. As with many a loosey-goosey Linklater joint before it, there's not much of a driving narrative here: it's more a series of vignettes. But at its best, it works like a powerful, evocative dream. **JN**



HAPPENING

★★★★

OUT **22 APRIL** / CERT **15** / **99 MINS**
DIRECTOR Audrey Diwan
CAST Anamaria Vartolomei, Luàna Bajrami

A promising young woman's life is thrown into disarray in '60s France as an unwanted pregnancy forces one bright student to embark on a perilous odyssey to get an illegal abortion. Director Audrey Diwan brings to life the true story of writer Annie Ernaux by adapting her memoir into an arresting, maddening yet always elegant feature. It's anchored by a revelatory performance from Anamaria Vartolomei as Anne, telegraphing her tenacity and terror with equal commitment. Diwan does well to avoid melodrama, and never shies away from the degree of physical turmoil Anne suffers as she navigates her pregnancy and often takes matters into her own hands. It's a powerful story told with fearless passion. Anne's struggle rings unnervingly true today — the fight for women's autonomy over their bodies is never really over. **EK**

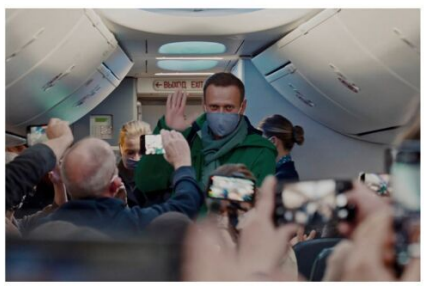


THE BAD GUYS

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **U** / **100 MINS**
DIRECTOR Pierre Perifel
CAST Sam Rockwell, Craig Robinson, Awkwafina, Richard Ayoade, Zazie Beetz

The Bad Guys is no *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*, but it's a fascinating example of its influence: a major studio making some brave creative choices. Opting for stylisation over realism, it has a lovely 3D-but-also-2D feel, which gives the film a much more handmade look. Shame, then, that the plot and characters run a little thin. It's a fairly basic story (adapted from the books by Aaron Blabey) about baddies learning how to become goodies, but there's some genuinely witty visual comedy: the army of hypnotised guinea pigs, for example, or the piranha who farts when he lies. With some gorgeously stylised animation and sharp comedy making up for its somewhat lightweight storytelling, *The Bad Guys* is... not bad. **JN**



NAVALNY

★★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **TBC** / **98 MINS**
DIRECTOR Daniel Roher
CAST Alexei Navalny, Christo Grozev, Yulia Navalnaya

This documentary follows Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in the days surrounding his poisoning. It was made before the invasion of Ukraine, but it couldn't be timelier; here is a first-hand account of what it means to go up against Putin, delivered as a political thriller. The assassination attempt is the event around which the movie hangs: the first half establishes why Navalny was such a thorn in the Kremlin's side; the second deals with the fallout, leading to the film's most extraordinary sequence, where Navalny prank-calls one of the scientists suspected of poisoning him. It's a remarkable, ground-level insight into a modern-day police state, and how any kind of meaningful opposition can exist — as terrifying as it is hopeful. **JN**

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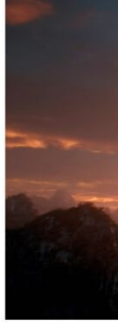
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Secret-seekers (left to right): Dan Fogler, Jessica Williams, Eddie Redmayne and Callum Turner.





[FILM]

FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE SECRETS OF DUMBLEDORE

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **12A** / **136 MINS**

DIRECTOR David Yates
CAST Eddie Redmayne, Jude Law, Mads Mikkelsen, Dan Fogler, Alison Sudol, Jessica Williams, Ezra Miller

PLOT Dark wizard Grindelwald (Mikkelsen) is gaining followers and making a bid for political legitimacy. Meanwhile, Albus Dumbledore (Law) hatches a plot to thwart his efforts with the help of a ragtag bunch of heroes — including Newt Scamander (Redmayne), muggle baker Jacob Kowalski (Fogler) and teacher Lally Hicks (Williams).

A HEAVY WEIGHT rests on *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets Of Dumbledore*. In the four years since *The Crimes Of Grindelwald* arrived to muted reviews and underwhelming box office, much has changed in the Wizarding World's orbit. J.K. Rowling's controversial comments on gender identity have cast a long shadow over the beloved world she created in *Harry Potter*; Johnny Depp resigned from the threequel one week into production at the studio's request, replaced by Mads Mikkelsen as the series' big bad, Grindelwald; *Potter* adapter Steve Kloves was brought aboard to share co-writing credits with Rowling. Tellingly, the year preceding *The Secrets Of Dumbledore* has involved a concerted effort, via anniversaries and reunion specials, to recapture the magic — a tacit acknowledgement of how much of it has been lost in recent years. So comes the multi-million-dollar question: can *The Secrets Of Dumbledore* possibly hope to reconjure some of it?

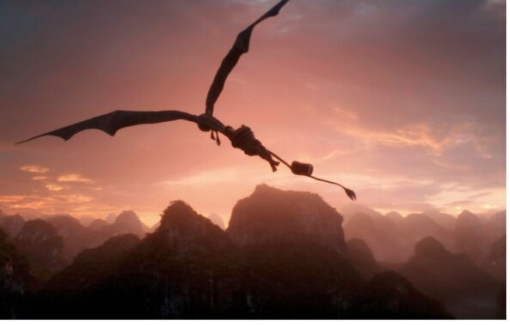
The answer, just about, is a yes — if not a resounding one. This is at least an improvement on *The Crimes Of Grindelwald*, in many ways a corrective to that film's aimless narrative, garbled exposition and unearned character decisions. While chunks of *Secrets* still feel muddily plotted, there's more fun to be had along the way, packing in some impressive wizard duel sequences, and a major beast-based set-piece that justifies the franchise's overarching title.

Some of that obscure(ial) plotting can be forgiven — often a feature more than a bug, since *The Secrets Of Dumbledore* positions itself as a spy thriller amid a brewing magical war. With the wizard-supremacist rhetoric of Grindelwald (whose new Mikkelsen-shaped appearance is no more remarked upon than that of Michael Gambon's Dumbledore in *The Prisoner Of Azkaban*) gaining ground, Dumbledore (Jude Law) hatches a plan of counter-attack — and



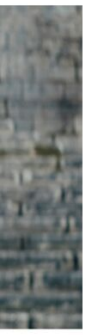
lest his pawns be captured, nobody is given the full plan. So it is that magizoologist Newt (Eddie Redmayne), his Auror brother Theseus (Callum Turner), assistant Bunty (Victoria Yeates), muggle baker Jacob (Dan Fogler), Ilvermorny teacher Lally (Jessica Williams, a likeable newcomer), and the mysterious Yusuf (William Nadylam) are split into groups on intersecting missions, masterminded by the wizarding legend. How it all fits together is on a need-to-know basis.

It would be nice for the audience to know, too — but despite an overstuffed plot, Dumbledore's game of wizarding chess is a mostly entertaining one. Newt remains an admirably ambling hero, introspective but good-natured, and his interplay with his cooler, calmer big brother is nicely played ("You're not swivelling properly!" Newt chides when the pair are forced to dance for a crowd of murderous, lobster-like manticores). Fogler's Jacob, too,









Above, top to bottom: Beastly goings-on; Ezra Miller returns as Credence. **Left:** Jude Law as Dumbledore. **Below left:** Mads Mikkelsen takes over as Grindelwald.

remains a franchise highlight as the outsider looking in on the Wizarding World —here given his own wand and stepping inside Hogwarts' hallowed halls, wish fulfilment at its highest.

The MVP, though, is Jude Law's Dumbledore. He's not quite the central character (the film lacks one, splitting focus between Dumbledore, Newt and Grindelwald; Ezra Miller's Credence features less prominently than expected), but he brings much-needed sparkle to proceedings, his Gambon-esque, twinkly warmth offset by a sense of unknowability. His opening confrontation with Grindelwald alone bears more chemistry and tension than the entire previous film — and yes, the pair's former romance is now, finally, acknowledged.

For all the charm here — fan-favourite Niffler, Teddy and Pickett the Bowtruckle get a heroic moment; the deer-like Qilin is totally adorable — *The Secrets Of Dumbledore* still feels a way off the heights of *Potter*. It's tonally imbalanced, fantastical whimsy butting heads with *Star Wars* prequel-esque political plotting and moments of full *Bambi* beast-based brutality. Despite some stylish sequences, Yates' direction (his seventh franchise entry) feels flat — embedding us in the Wizarding World often results in the magical being rendered mundane. But with answers regarding Credence's lineage and a hopeful finale that sets a promising stage for a fourth (and perhaps final) chapter, *Secrets* offers glimmers of a phoenix-like resurrection. Mischief more or less managed. **BEN TRAVIS**

VERDICT ***The Secrets Of Dumbledore*** **doesn't quite cast a *Potter*-like spell — but with solid action and moments of genuine heart, it delivers a little light in the Wizarding World's darkest hour.**



Come on, who *doesn't* wear a sequinned jumpsuit in the jungle?

[FILM]

THE LOST CITY

★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **TBC** / **112 MINS**

DIRECTORS Adam Nee, Aaron Nee
CAST Sandra Bullock, Channing Tatum, Daniel Radcliffe, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Brad Pitt

PLOT When grieving romance novelist Loretta (Bullock) is kidnapped by an eccentric billionaire (Radcliffe), her cover model Alan (Tatum) takes off after her in an attempt to prove that he's more than just a pretty face. Unfortunately for their chances of survival, that face might really be all they have.

DEATH CANNOT STOP true love; it can only delay it for a while. Or so *The Princess Bride* taught us. Sure enough, the much bally-hooed death of the big-screen romcom is beginning to look more like a hiatus, because here we are in 2022 with a crowd-pleasing, star-led romance in an exotic location. If much of directors Adam and Aaron Nee's plot feels like a throwback to an earlier era, and in particular to *Romancing The Stone*, the humour here is entirely up-to-date and immensely fun.

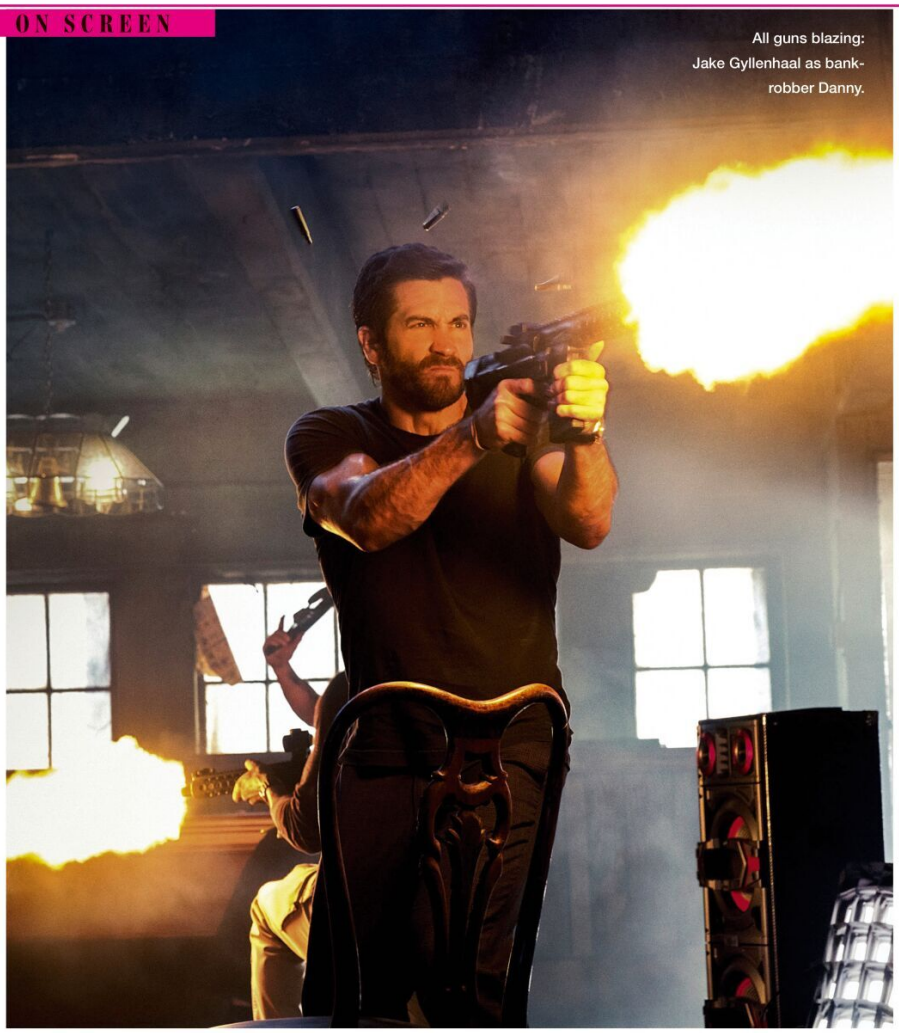
The familiar bits first: Sandra Bullock steps into Kathleen Turner's shoes as a successful romance novelist whose personal life is a mess. But unlike Joan Wilder, Bullock's Loretta is grieving a lost husband, and seems irritable at the success of her own books. In place of Michael Douglas' tough jungle guide we have Channing Tatum's gentle cover model Alan, who's nursing both a crush on and a grudge against Loretta, the latter for her refusal to take her own books seriously. However, when she's kidnapped by a media billionaire's son, Abigail Fairfax (Daniel Radcliffe), Alan swings ineffectually into action, and soon our two heroes are lost in the jungle of a small island, bickering and perhaps bonding as they try to find safety.

None of this is particularly new, of course. Bullock has played the wary, uptight over-achiever before; Tatum's given us previous variations on witless-yet-beautiful; even a bit with leeches has been done before. But the film finds nuance to season the archetypes. There's more than lip service paid to Loretta's grief and her dashed dreams of serious scholarship, and while she's not immune to Alan's looks, you can see why he wouldn't be on her radar. Tatum, meanwhile, gamely plays the bimbo role, but manages to inject just enough edge to suggest that Alan's brain is merely underutilised and not entirely absent.

With the stars carrying the film along, the Nees can add emotion and humour in the detail. They mine laughs from Alan's phone contacts and Fairfax's cheese board, while costume designer Marlene Stewart puts Bullock in a fuschia-coloured sequinned jumpsuit that plays well against the otherwise standard jungle aesthetics. Brad Pitt's hyper-capable survival trainer, Jack Trainer, is an awe-inspiring embodiment of the romance novel archetype who threatens even the usually laid-back Alan, while Da'Vine Joy Randolph does a lot with very little as Loretta's editor. Radcliffe even comes close to saying something true about the entitlement and self-righteousness of the super-wealthy as a black-sheep billionaire.

Really, though, you have to *want* to find deeper meanings here. This movie is like its star's jumpsuit: sparkly, gorgeous and entirely frivolous. It coasts by on charisma and comedic talent, on dancing and daring, on stunning locations (the Dominican jungle) and stakes that are high enough to hold the attention and not a millimetre higher. You will predict almost every beat before it arrives and welcome its arrival anyway, because the formula works. The romcom is dead; long live the romcom. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT **Sandra Bullock and Channing Tatum make a sweet and spiky couple in this likeable caper. It's never going to challenge *The African Queen* for quality, but it offers a consistently good time.**



All guns blazing: Jake Gyllenhaal as bank-robber Danny.







Top to bottom: Paramedic Cam (Eiza González) gets taken hostage; The titular vehicle; Will (Yayha Abdul-Mateen II).

[FILM]

AMBULANCE

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15**
136 MINS

DIRECTOR Michael Bay
CAST Jake Gyllenhaal, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Eiza González, Jackson White

PLOT Needing money for his wife's surgery, Will (Abdul-Mateen II) reluctantly agrees to rob a bank with his adoptive brother, Danny (Gyllenhaal). When their getaway goes wrong, they hijack an ambulance, holding a wounded cop (White) and a paramedic (González) hostage; a high-speed police chase on the streets of LA ensues.

MICHAEL BAY 'GOING small' is everyone else's 'going absolutely bloody massive'. *Ambulance*, the action specialist's 15th feature film, was trumpeted as a return to the director's roots, shot rapidly in the summer of 2020 on a fraction of the budget he usually plays with. His roots, of course, were hardly subtle affairs, and neither is *Ambulance* — but it's the closest to his career high, *The Rock*, that he's been in years.

After the self-indulgent misfire of his last film, *6 Underground*, this is a cracking example of how Bayhem can work (to an extent) within some tight parameters. The straightforward premise, taken from the Danish film of the same name, is sound: two brothers, one of good heart (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, on steadfast form), one near-psychopathic (Jake Gyllenhaal, on deranged form), one paramedic hostage (Eiza González, the grown-up in the room), and one ambulance, versus the entire LAPD. On paper it's about a bank heist, but the film rattles through that part fairly quickly, because this is to its core a chase movie; like *Speed* before it, it takes the concrete highways of Los Angeles as its grand stage.

Almost reassuringly, Bay's hallmarks are still here. Golden hour is still 24 hours long. Clichéd dialogue still abounds ("Nobody knows this city better than you!"). Bay has still never met a lens he doesn't want to flare. Anything that can explode probably still will. But he's added some new feathers to his cap: in an audaciously meta move, Michael Bay characters are now able to reference and even quote previous Michael Bay films; his camera is nowhere near as sleazy as it once was; and spiralling drone-shots give his frame dizzying new perspectives.

Those acrobatic angles, in fact, add an entirely new dimension to Bay's action, and the action is really the only reason we're all here. At times you will wonder how the hell a camera even fitted between the congruence of speeding metal and conflagrations. The pace, too, is relentless and white-knuckle. "We're locomotives," screams Gyllenhaal's character at one point, "we don't stop" — which really sounds like Bay describing his own work ethic. Lord knows how a man approaching 60 can keep these energy levels up.

It's by no means always coherent: that relentless pursuit of pace often results in hard-to-follow editing, and the director seems to share the same philosophy towards sound-mixing as Christopher Nolan, with sonic fury sometimes prioritised over audibility. Much of the film pays serious respect to police militarisation, too, which seems out of step with the mood of America. And a lot of it is just tremendously silly: a farting dog is a key plot point, while someone yells at a crucial moment about their cashmere jumper.

It doesn't all work. But when the sirens are blaring at their best, it is a reminder of why nobody does bold, brash, bonkers blockbusting quite as thrillingly — or loudly — as Bay. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **Michael Bay's tribute to the emergency services (which involves blowing several of them up) is noisy, messy and frequently absurd — yet still somehow his most gleefully entertaining effort in at least a decade.**


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[FILM]

THE BUBBLE

★★★

OUT **NOW (NETFLIX)**
CERT **TBC** / **126 MINS**

DIRECTOR Judd Apatow
CAST Karen Gillan, Peter Serafinowicz, Leslie Mann, David Duchovny, Iris Apatow, Keegan-Michael Key, Pedro Pascal, Guz Khan

PLOT At the height of the Covid pandemic, the cast and crew of dinosaur-sequel epic 'Cliff Beasts 6', led by returning star Carol Cobb (Gillan), are forced to quarantine in an English country hotel before filming. But as the restrictions take their toll, the production descends into chaos.

THE BUBBLE IS an odd concoction. It is, in part, a satire of a film that hasn't even been released yet: co-writers Judd Apatow and Pam Brady were inspired by the production of *Jurassic World Dominion*, which was the first major film to resume work after the initial Covid lockdown back in 2020. While it's not quite a direct spoof, the sixth *Jurassic* film gets a fair few nods, via *The Bubble*'s movie-within-a-movie, 'Cliff Beasts 6'. (Leslie Mann even shares Bryce Dallas Howard's ginger bob.)

For Apatow, who also directs, it marks something of an unexpected departure: after years swimming in the comedy-drama pool — making funny films with emotional, serious stakes such as *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* or *The King Of Staten Island* — he's gone for something straightforwardly sillier here, a tone and plot akin to *Tropic Thunder*. Establishing an eccentric ensemble of egomaniacs, Apatow imagines an *Apocalypse Now*-scale disastrous production, where everything that could possibly go wrong does indeed go wrong — with the added element of swabs being shoved up noses.

With only a loose narrative thread, *The Bubble* plays almost like a series of comic vignettes, and like any sketch show, it can be hit-and-miss. The actual spoofed movie scenes, for example, aren't quite as funny as everyone involved seems to think they are; 'Cliff Beasts 6', were it ever to exist, would be *The Room* levels of bad. The fake actors don't so much chew the scenery as swallow it whole, adopting hammy accents that even Jared Leto would have second thoughts about. A dinosaur doing a TikTok dance, meanwhile, is enough to break anyone's suspension of disbelief.

The comedy finds a better hold when we get a sense of the dynamics of the ensemble, and the cast can bounce off each other. In a Brit-heavy line-up, it's the home team who most consistently bring the goods: Karen Gillan, as the nominal lead of both the real and fake movie, lends flashes of Amy Pond to her Carol Cobb; Guz Khan, of BBC Three's *Man Like Mobeen* fame, steals the show with his infectious, wild-eyed energy (choice line: "Suck your mother!"); while comedy duo Ben Ashenden and Alexander Owen — whose Zoom-based comedy made them social-media heroes during the height of the pandemic — make winning cameos as endlessly emasculated mo-cap dinosaur doubles.

Like a lot of Apatow films, it has a scattershot quality that might have benefited from a tighter edit; no comedy movie needs to be longer than two hours. But there is some cathartic fun to be had in poking fun at an experience we have all collectively endured in some way, and as a three-decade veteran of the industry, Apatow gleefully pulls no punches in biting the Hollywood hand that feeds. This, we are told in title cards, is the story of those who "fought heroically to bring distractions to humanity" — which neatly puts everything into context. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **Judd Apatow's broadest film yet is a patchy collection of Covid-themed comedy cock-ups — but a talented ensemble of performers means you're never too far away from your next laugh.**



MURINA

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15** / **96 MINS**

DIRECTOR Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic
CAST Gracija Filipovic, Leon Lucev, Danica Curcic, Cliff Curtis

Executive-produced by Martin Scorsese and exploring toxic masculinity in all its guises, Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic's debut feature won Cannes' Caméra d'Or. The Croatian setting looks superb, as strong-willed teenager Julija (Gracija Filipovic) seeks to exploit a millionaire's visit to challenge the grip that her father exerts over her and her mother. As Julija is imprisoned in an island stronghold, there's a latter-day fairy-tale feel to the action, reinforced by mesmerising underwater sequences. Yet this can't disguise the simplistic characterisation, and any sense of brooding menace is dissipated by a lengthy denouement that makes all too clear the story's melodramatic beats. **DP**



CASABLANCA BEATS

★★★

OUT **29 APRIL** / CERT **12A** / **102 MINS**
DIRECTOR Nabil Ayouch
CAST Ismail Adouab, Nouhaila Arif, Samah Barigou, Abdelilah Basbousi

For filmgoers, the thought of music in Casablanca brings to mind the twinkling keys of Rick's Café Américain. Nabil Ayouch's charming new film hands the mic to the young Moroccans living in the city today, with a story about a mercurial rap teacher and a group of students who, thanks to the magic of hip-hop, find their own voices. If that sounds like *Dead Poets Society* with a backing track, you're not far off. Hearty, complex and very real discussions about religion and politics evolve from debate into powerful lyrics, and an earnest crowd-pleaser becomes an invigorating rally for the arts and self-expression. The lesson plan is familiar, but it's still worth attending this school of rap. **JC**

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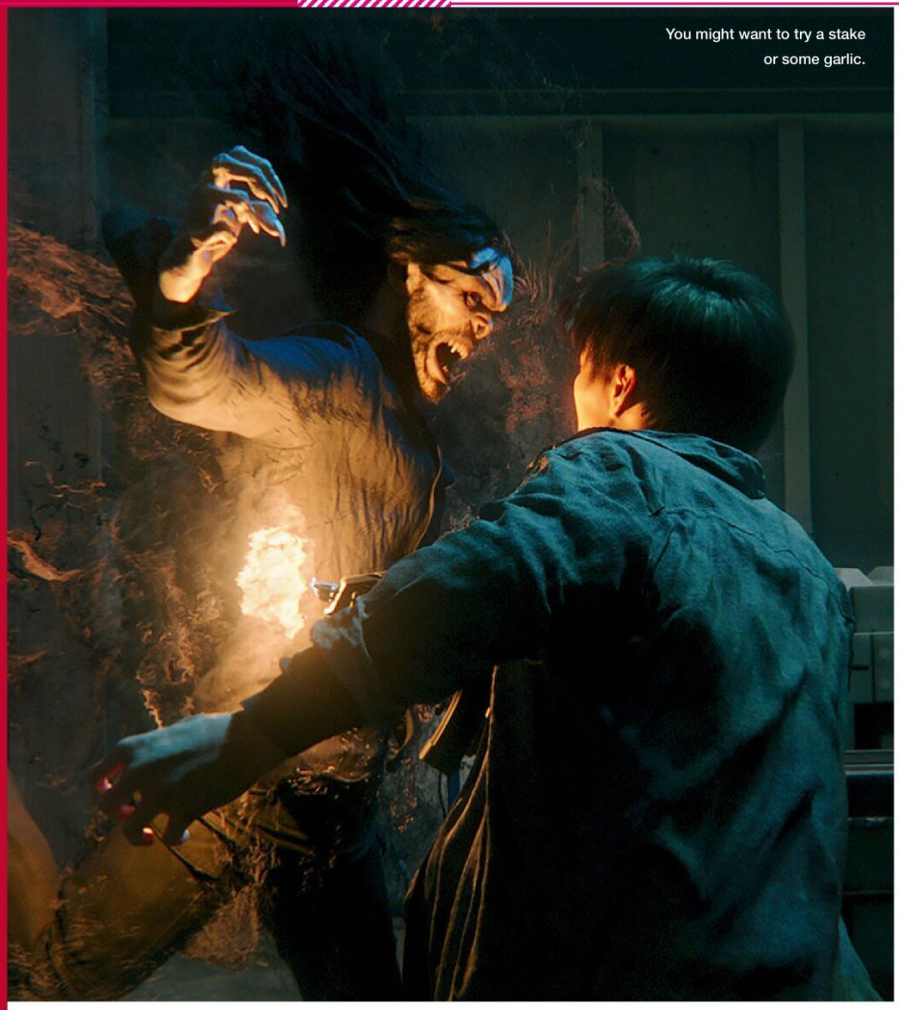
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Top to bottom: Jared Leto on the edge; Matt Smith as Milo; Morbius with fellow doc Martine (Adria Arjona).

[FILM]

MORBIUS

★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **15** / **104 MINS**

DIRECTOR Daniel Espinosa
CAST Jared Leto, Matt Smith, Adria Arjona, Jared Harris

PLOT Medical genius Dr Michael Morbius (Leto) is slowly dying from a blood disorder. In search of a cure, funded by childhood friend Milo (Smith) and with the help of colleague Martine (Arjona), he combines human DNA with that of a vampire bat. The procedure results in some superhuman side effects — but can he control them?

SUPERHEROES ARE GETTING moodier. The idea of 'dark' comic-book adaptations isn't exactly new, but lately they've stepped up a gear, with Matt Reeves' extraordinarily emo *The Batman*, and Marvel's venture into the murky morality of *Moon Knight*. Sony's latest MCU-adjacent Spidey-villain spin-off attempts to jump on this tone-shifting bandwagon, focusing on their most bloodthirsty of anti-heroes: a living vampire.

Unlike the hapless Eddie Brock, the other anti-hero of a franchise once unfortunately named the Sony Pictures Universe Of Marvel Characters (or 'SPUMC'), Dr Michael Morbius is actively looking for his superpower. A medical savant, Nobel Prize rejector, artificial blood creator and terminal blood-disorder patient, he uses the super-important anticoagulants in the blood of vampire bats (don't think too deeply about the science stuff; *Morbius*' script certainly doesn't) to develop a cure, which transforms his emaciated, fragile body into a powerful, muscular one. Just one problem — he now needs human blood to survive.

It's saying something when your most grounded performance in years is as a superhuman vampire, but that is strangely true of Jared Leto, here finding a quiet sincerity that's far less showy than the distracting accents (*House Of Gucci*) and messianic tendencies (*WeCrashed*) of more recent roles. The main trio of him, Matt Smith (Morbius' pal Milo) and Adria Arjona (fellow doctor Martine Bancroft) are woefully under-developed; outside of their relationship to Morbius, Milo and Martine's character-development is non-existent. He is forced into the mould of cartoonish villain (the kind of which Smith can do in his sleep, but still proves unsatisfying); she ends up nothing more than a disposable love-interest.

Visually, *Morbius* does some interesting things with its titular hero's powers. His superspeed is signified by a trailing haze around him, which, visually, doesn't entirely work, but the use of slow-mo to pick moments out of the hectic set-pieces is effective — an extended fight and flight through a subway station being a particular standout. Seeing his echo-location powers ricochet off walls, ripple across New York City and pump through the air as he tracks a heartbeat is also cool. It's just a shame we didn't see him get to grips with it all — instead, his abilities are explained through an exposition dump, and seemingly mastered instantly. All of this falters in a nosedive of a final act, during which any sense of climactic action is masked completely by incessant swarms of bats, poorly rendered breaking glass and blurry, crumbling buildings.

Morbius' core concept is strong — two friends close enough to be brothers, bonded by their shared suffering, who'll do anything to spend one day feeling truly alive rather than at death's door. Unfortunately, it's not properly supported by any other element of the film, with messy action, wafer-thin characters and an even slighter plot letting down what could have been a lean, dark, interesting instalment in the SPUMC. And don't even get us started on those unforgivable post-credit stings. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

VERDICT **Despite solid performances and flashes of promise, *Morbius* is a flat, forgettable affair, failing to deliver an anti-hero origin story we can really sink our teeth into.**



Left: Oscar Isaac as Moon Knight. **Right:** Ethan Hawke as nemesis Arthur Harrow. **Below:** Man in the mirror.

[TV]

MOON KNIGHT

★★★★

OUT **NOW (DISNEY+)**
EPISODES SEEN **4 OF 6**

SHOWRUNNER Jeremy Slater
CAST Oscar Isaac, Ethan Hawke, May Calamawy, F. Murray Abraham

PLOT Museum gift-shop employee and Egyptologist Steven Grant (Isaac) has a sleeping disorder. He wakes up in strange places, experiences peculiar dreams, and regularly hallucinates a sinister, bandage-wrapped apparition. Except Steven is actually Marc, his dreams are real, and that spectral mummy is the earthly incarnation of an ornery Egyptian moon god.



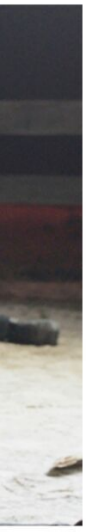
KARL PILKINGTON IS not, we might argue, the most obvious place to look to when bringing a Marvel superhero to life. And yet, that's precisely the inspiration Oscar Isaac has cited when conjuring Moon Knight's hapless alter ego: bumbling tat-peddler Steven Grant. A significant shift from the comics' Grant (a genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist — you know the type), Isaac's iteration trades suave sophistication for maladroit blundering, topped off by a highly mannered (and internet-maligned) accent.

What's remarkable, however, is not that this six-part series is Marvel's take on *An Idiot Abroad*, but that Isaac's Grant very quickly establishes himself as the show's — and possibly the whole of Phase Four's — most joyous new addition. From the moment we meet him, absently feeding a one-finned goldfish while leaving his mum a voicemail ("Laters, gators!"), before being soundly bollocked for workplace tardiness by eye-rolling line-manager Donna (Lucy Thackeray), Steven is effortlessly, almost preternaturally charming. His north-east London tenor (an affectation of Isaac's own design) not only helps the oft-farcical comedy squarely land, but lends him an irresistible affability that underpins the entire series. So much so, in fact, that when vastly more competent alter-ego Marc Spector periodically emerges, it's oddly disappointing, leaving you counting down the minutes until Steven's ungainly return.

Because shopboy Steven is more than he appears. Suffering from dissociative personality disorder, he is the more mundane persona of Spector's hard-bitten mercenary. As Marc, he's blessed with Bourne-level combat skills and a second job MoonKnighting as an instrument of vengeance for Khonshu, an Egyptian moon god with the skull of a bird and the voice of F. Murray Abraham. Through the course of the show's first two episodes, the pieces of Steven/Marc's personality puzzle slowly come together, gradually revealing not only his complex personal history, but a mass-murdering plot by Ethan Hawke's Arthur Harrow, a charismatic cult-leader and agent of rival deity Ammit.

As far as set-ups go, it's as far from the traditional hero origin story as Moon Knight himself is from the traditional hero. Batman might be vengeance, but even he is bound by a (somewhat impractical) no-kill code. Khonshu's assassin, on the other hand, has no such inhibitions and will



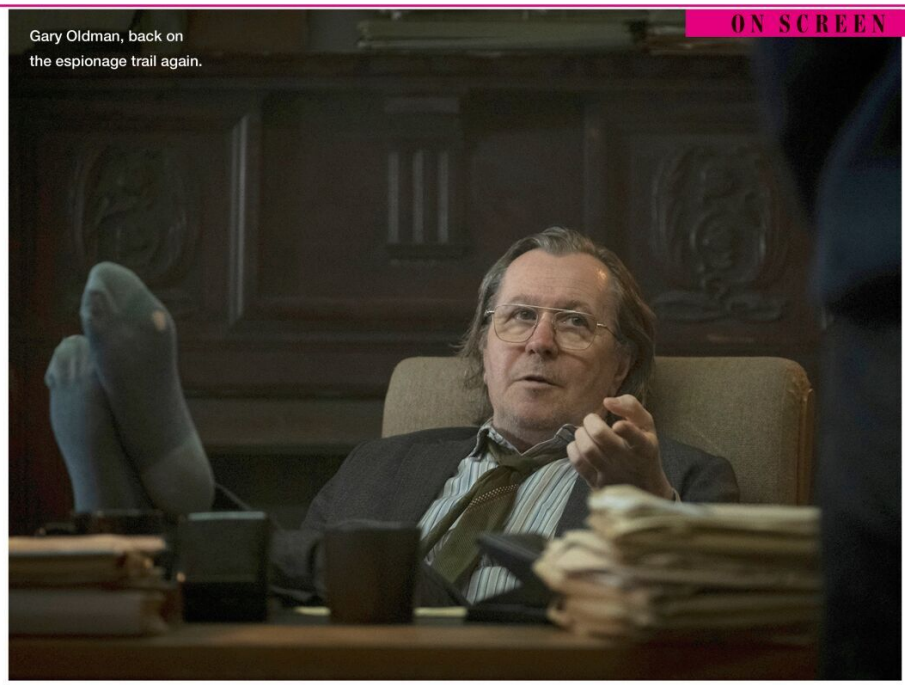


happily murderise anyone that gets in his way with wild and bloody abandon. The split personas of Steven/Mark also (in a delightful touch) have distinct looks while wearing the cape: Marc's Knight being is the traditional cowled figure of lore, while Steven's sports a white mask, gloves and three-piece-suit, appearing like the love child of Paul Daniels and The Stig.

It's when we transition from Moon Knight-at-the-museum hijinks (a running fight with an invisible devil dog, which spills from the exhibit hall onto the streets of London, is a standout) to more Indiana Jones-style globetrotting that *Moon Knight* begins to wobble. Much of the third episode is spent in search of something that has already been found, the plot becoming nebulous and occasionally hard to follow. Meanwhile, May Calamawy's Layla El-Faouly — a blast from Spector's past — feels like an afterthought. However, the fourth instalment brings things back to clarity, with a dose of old-school action-horror reminiscent of Stephen Sommers' *The Mummy*, harking back to Moon Knight's horror-comic roots before setting up some mind-bending internal escapades that carry hints of Noah Hawley's *Legion*.

Marvel's first TV series in this new MCU-integrated era to introduce a new headline character, *Moon Knight* is — four episodes in — a boldly bonkers affair that manages to capture the same giddy joy imbued in *Hawkeye* and *Loki*. In taking a relatively obscure character and leaning into his more eccentric elements, writer Jeremy Slater (*Fantastic Four*, *The Umbrella Academy*) has delivered something that feels genuinely different from any corner of the MCU yet explored — somehow managing to make Egyptian gods canon in the process. Not everything runs smoothly, and the larger narrative is at times less compelling than the quirky character work. But thanks to the inspired inception of Isaac's Steven Grant, and a story that judiciously places the central character's humanity on a level with his heroics, Marvel's newest addition shoots for the moon and largely hits its mark. **JAMES DYER**

VERDICT **Fresh, funny and occasionally batshit, *Moon Knight* is an MCU departure in both topic and tone, spicing the superhero formula with a cocktail of comedy-horror and a twist of old-school adventure.**



Gary Oldman, back on the espionage trail again.

[TV]

SLOW HORSES

★★★★

OUT **NOW (APPLE TV+)**
EPISODES VIEWED **6 OF 6**

SHOWRUNNERS Will Smith, James Hawes
CAST Gary Oldman, Jack Lowden, Olivia Cooke, Kristin Scott Thomas, Christopher Chung, Dustin Demri-Burns, Antonio Aakeel

PLOT Disgraced MI5 agent River Cartwright (Lowden) is shunted to the service's notoriously useless unit, Slough House, but he still finds a way to investigate the case of young Muslim Hassan Ahmed (Aakeel), held hostage by a far-right group who plan on executing him live on the internet.

IT BEGINS WITH a spectacularly staged airport-set action set-piece which wouldn't look out of place in a Bond or Bourne movie. Kristin Scott Thomas, proving she'd make a brilliant M, is MI5 Head Of Ops Diana Taverner, watching from her vast, shiny espionage HQ as young agent River Cartwright (Jack Lowden) does his level best to screw up his mission to apprehend a suspected terrorist bomber. The revelation that this tense, taut sequence isn't quite what it appears only adds to the overall sense of audacity.

After this dazzling opening, the storytelling settles down into something calmer yet always absorbing, as Cartwright is sent to Slough House, the MI5 equivalent of Siberia — a grim, back-street London office where a seemingly pointless admin department is based, run by veteran misanthrope Jackson Lamb (Gary Oldman). This is the main setting of the show's source material, Mick Herron's 2010 novel *Slow Horses*, and the subsequent 11 books in his 'Slough House' series. The grimy, decaying locale is undoubtedly reminiscent of the workplace of Sandra Oh's Eve in Series 1 of fellow prestige espionage drama *Killing Eve* — where Fiona Shaw's MI6 boss famously "once saw a rat drink from a can of Coke".

In fact, Herron's novel was published seven years before the Luke Jennings novella that inspired *Killing Eve*. The two shows do share a lot of wryly funny tonal DNA, though, as well as the central theme that the donkey-work of global intelligence-gathering can be comically unglamorous — more *The Office* than *Casino Royale*. Indeed, if Bourne and Bond are at the glitzy, hi-octane peak of the spying game, and John le Carré's George Smiley occupies the dignified middle-ground, then Jackson Lamb is shamelessly rooted to the bottom rung, and his entire staff of has-been and never-was misfits occupy the naughty step.

It's a delightful and cunning casting coup that Lamb is played by the great Gary Oldman, over a decade on from his beautifully modulated, Oscar-nominated version of Smiley in the superb 2011 film of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. His performance here is a tour de force of wheezily profane indifference. You can almost smell the musty odour emanating from his manky old suit, as he rules his crumbling empire with gleeful hostility, and tries to stop any of them from actually doing any proper espionage work. And yet... there are hints that deep down, Lamb kind of, almost, a bit *does* care. At one point during a riveting tête-à-tête with Scott Thomas' chilly supremo, Taverner, he explains that while his team may be a bunch of fucking losers, they are, at least, *his* bunch of fucking losers. Writer Will Smith (*Veep*) and director James Hawes (*Penny Dreadful*) do a great job convincing us this is probably what the intelligence business is really like, while providing an immensely entertaining plot for this rabble to solve. **BOYD HILTON**

VERDICT **A grimily authentic espionage yarn populated by a bunch of funny, intriguing "losers, misfits and boozers", as they're described in the lyrics of the wonderfully atmospheric Mick Jagger theme song.**

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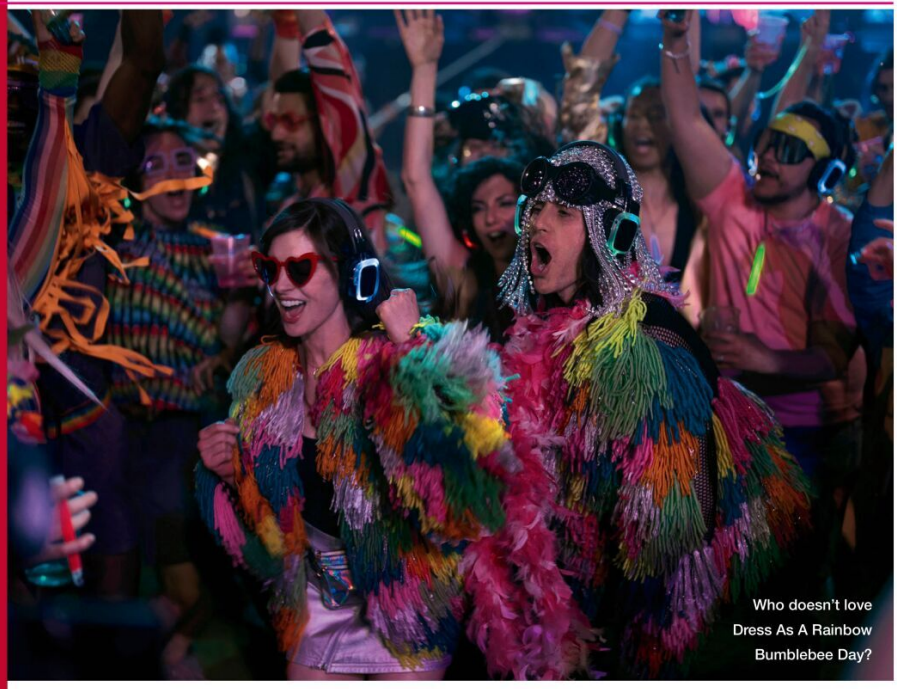
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Who doesn't love Dress As A Rainbow Bumblebee Day?

[TV]

WECRASHED

★★★

OUT **NOW (APPLE TV+)**
EPISODES WATCHED **8 OF 8**

SHOWRUNNERS Lee Eisenberg, Drew Crevello
CAST Jared Leto, Anne Hathaway, Kyle Marvin, America Ferrera

PLOT Adam Neumann (Leto) is an entrepreneur going nowhere when he meets wealthy yoga instructor Rebekah (Hathaway). With her support, Neumann co-founds the office-space company WeWork, at one point valued at $47 billion. But Neumann's lavish lifestyle and unconventional approach soon threaten to bring the company down.

STORIES ABOUT THE rise-and-fall of start-up businesses have been experiencing their own bubble lately: this year alone has seen *Inventing Anna*, *The Dropout* and the forthcoming *Bad Blood*. *WeCrashed*, thankfully, isn't a sign of any stock-market implosion, but it does hint at the limits of where this in-vogue subgenre can go.

This story begins in September 2019, where, at WeWork's "galactic headquarters", Adam Neumann (Jared Leto) is forcibly removed as CEO of his own company; we then flash back to the trail of hubris and excess that took a co-working startup from an investor "unicorn" to a failed IPO (initial public offering). It all pops with the energy and chaos of similar billionaire balls-ups — the hedonistic corporate culture of *The Wolf Of Wall Street*, the unfettered Big Tech ambition of *The Social Network*. Justin Timberlake's famous line from the latter, about how a million dollars isn't cool, even gets its own spin here, Neumann at one point declaring: "I don't want to be a billionaire — I want to be a *trillionaire*."

That kind of grotesque greed needs a charismatic vessel. It finds just that in Jared Leto; if you're looking to cast a rock star CEO, it makes sense to hire an actual rock star. He's magnetic in the role — a tornado of charm and arrogance. Through his endless quixotic sales pitches, we quickly understand how a fairly unremarkable startup could — through platitudinous mission statements like "raising the consciousness of the world" — be valued at billions.

Neumann meets his match in Anne Hathaway's new-age Rebekah; together, they are, as she puts it, "two cosmic voyagers, bound together by a transcendent love." She's initially positioned as a cynic immune to Neumann's charms, and then living in his shadow jealously, before doubling down on his bullshit. They end up a couple of delusional mad monarchs: an emperor and empress with no clothes.

As the absurdity builds, it plays like a wry black comedy. But despite spending most of the running time with them, the show never quite gets under the skin of Adam or Rebekah. It touches on their dysfunctional family history, but that's about it, rarely advancing beyond the basic motivators of pride and greed — maybe simply because the writers don't know the full story.

Perhaps it could have benefited from exploring the structures and conditions that allowed Neumann to get away with so much, or occasionally focusing on the many, many employees who lost jobs and small fortunes under his watch (one episode begins from a worker's perspective, before switching back to the main duo). Like its recent cousins, *WeCrashed* is clearly hoping the schadenfreude of seeing bad people fail upwards will be watchable enough — and it is consistently watchable. But if we collectively examined what's behind all these ruinous business failures, perhaps we wouldn't need so many dramatisations. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT **It treads familiar ground to other rise-and-fall cautionary tales, and somewhat lacks a point of view — but *WeCrashed* is still farcically entertaining, buoyed by Jared Leto's electric performance as Adam Neumann.**

ON SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view of this month's reviews



FILM
OUT NOW

AMBULANCE	★★★	P40
APOLLO 10 1/2: A SPACE AGE CHILDHOOD	★★★★	P36
THE BAD GUYS	★★★	P36
THE BUBBLE	★★★	P42
FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE SECRETS OF DUMBLEDORE (ABOVE)	★★★	P38
JUJUTSU KAISEN 0	★★★	P33
THE LOST CITY	★★★	P39
MORBIUS	★★	P45
MURINA	★★★	P42
NAVALNY	★★★★	P36
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2	★★	P36
X	★★★★	P33

15 APRIL

BENEDETTA	★★★★	P34
THE NORTHMAN	★★★★★	P30

22 APRIL

HAPPENING	★★★★	P36
PLAYGROUND	★★★★★	P36
THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT	★★★★	P32

29 APRIL

CASABLANCA BEATS	★★★	P42

6 MAY

THE CONTRACTOR	★★★	P33

TV
OUT NOW

MOON KNIGHT	★★★★	P46
SLOW HORSES	★★★★	P47
WECRASHED	★★★	P49

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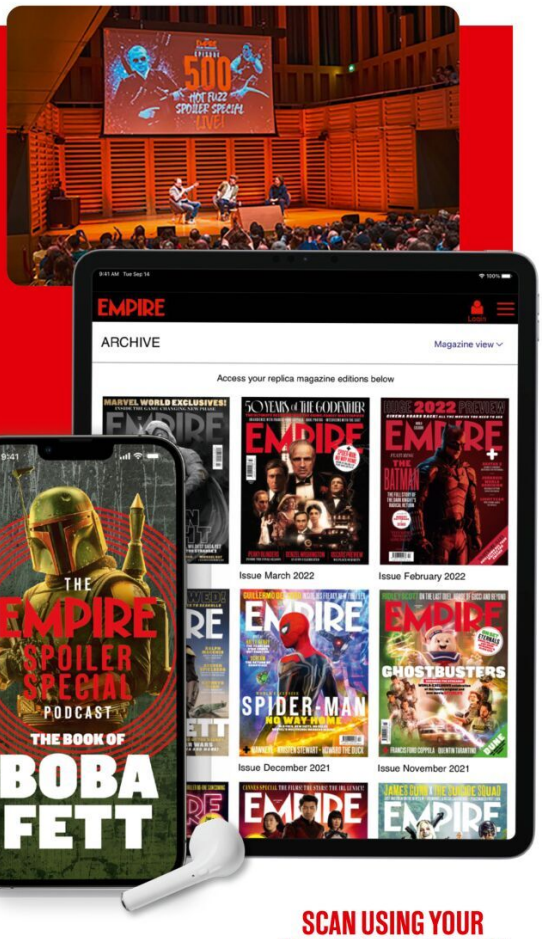
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CHAOS



READY FOR AN EXTINCTION-LEVEL EVENT MOVIE? IN AN
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APATOSAURUS-SIZED WORLD EXCLUSIVE, **EMPIRE** VISITS DINOSAUR SPECTACULAR TO END THEM ALL

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

"YOU'RE GOING TO SEE JEFF GOLDBLUM DO SOME CRAZY SHIT."



This would be, at any time, in any place, an exciting promise. After all, Jeff Goldblum is a one-man carnival, a human so effervescently entertaining that there exists a YouTube video of his *Jurassic Park* character, Ian Malcolm, laughing on loop for ten solid hours (it's been viewed, so far, by 137,000 people). His jazz nights are legendary, not just for the music but for the fact that he'll happily read out audience members' WhatsApp messages to the room in dramatic fashion. He might play an impromptu round of Seven Degrees Of Jeff Goldblum with you, or announce that he feels "sleek as a panther". Anything is possible.

But today that promise, delivered to *Empire* by director Colin Trevorrow, feels especially electric. Because it's approaching midnight on the vast Pinewood Studios backlot, which has been painstakingly terraformed into a mossy primordial forest, and it's not just regular Jeff Goldblum approaching us through the spookily convincing artificial trees. It's Jeff Goldblum *as Ian Malcolm*. The man who puts the 'Ian' in 'chaotician' was briefly revived for 2018's *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* for two short scenes in which Malcolm addressed a Senate committee. But now the globally beloved character is back in black. Wearing a dark outfit and with just a hint of chest hair showing, Goldblum steps forward into a pool of magical God-light, wiggles his hips, stares upwards, then asks a question.

"Should I beckon to it?"

The "it" in question is the star's scene partner, an 11-ton, 22-foot-tall dinosaur. It's called the Giganotosaurus, but everyone refers to it as the 'Giga', presumably because using short words is best when you're in the vicinity of something bigger, badder and nastier than even an Indominus Rex. "I wanted something that felt like the Joker," Trevorrow explains of the colossal animatronic, which has scarring on its face resembling melted make-up. "It just wants to watch the world burn."

And, as Goldblum's spontaneous suggestion is declined (some shit, it turns out, is just *too* crazy), and a small, gathered crowd (including fellow returning *Jurassic* stalwarts Laura Dern and Sam Neill) watch, slowly the beast begins to come to life.

First, its huge yellow eyes blink. Then, its tongue — roughly the size of a transit van; slathered with a viscous liquid doubling for dino slobber — jolts forward. Before *Empire*'s eyes, as operated by a band of technicians, this hulking mechanical mountain comes alive: breathing, snarling, terrifying. "We're living in this theme-park ride," marvels Chris Pratt, who's on set too. "I mean, people pay hundreds of dollars and wait in line just to get a chance to see something like that."

It's glorious, an astounding feat of old-school effects-work. Until it isn't. Because in true *Jurassic* style, science goes awry, and the dinosaur suddenly shuts down. "My Giga broke," mourns Trevorrow. "These things are finicky," sympathises Goldblum, a man who would know, having spent days on the original film



Top to bottom: You're gonna need a bigger studio — Pinewood plays host to an animatronic Giganotosaurus during filming; Jeff Goldblum and director Colin Trevorrow on set.





shooting with a practical T-Rex. The craziness is, for now, on pause.

Within this eye-popping tableau lies everything you need to know about *Jurassic World Dominion*, the summer blockbuster that's the climax of not just one trilogy, but two. It's a goliath event movie that remixes the elements you love about the series in bold new ways. Everything is bigger: the scale, the stakes, the cast.

But, as is often the case when dealing with dinosaurs, putting *Dominion* together was anything but an easy ride.

IT BEGAN WITH THE PUSH OF

a big red button. At the end of *Fallen Kingdom*, clone kid Maisie (Isabella Sermon) made the decision to save dinosaurs from being gassed to death, releasing them into the wild. It was a huge, game-changing moment, transforming everything about the world of *Jurassic World*. And Colin Trevorrow, the architect of the franchise (he directed the first film in the new trilogy and has ›



co-written all three) and the one who had *really* pushed that button, faced the daunting task, along with co-writer Emily Carmichael, of mapping out what would come next. "It's an entirely new kind of movie," he says. "It's the thing I've been waiting to do this whole time."

Planet Earth is overrun. Dinosaurs are in the ocean, they're in the skies, they're in the snow. They're even, as the standalone preview footage which dropped online last summer showed, invading double-bill drive-through screenings of *American Graffiti* and *Flash Gordon*, proving definitively that T-Rexes love Brian Blessed. *Dominion*, then, is not contained to a tropical island west of Costa Rica. It's a globetrotting saga with two distinct story-strands, which will converge in BioSyn Valley, the location of an amber-rich mountain range, and the domain of the Giga. "BioSyn got the contract to house the dinosaurs that have been captured around the world via various governments," Trevorrow explains. "They claim it's a research facility where they can study the pharmaceutical values of the animals. But there's some other stuff going on."

One half of the double-helix plot involves the *Jurassic World* heroes we've got to know, Owen Grady (Pratt) and Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard), plus a new character, cargo pilot Kayla Watts (DeWanda Wise), on a personal mission. Their journey will take them to Malta, and an illicit dinosaur market (complete with fighting ring) that Trevorrow compares to *Star Wars*' Mos Eisley cantina. "In the last movie, we had dinosaurs being sold off and did it in a very... I don't want to say *Eyes Wide Shut* way, but it was a very different movie. And that was cool. But I felt that what would really happen is a hive of scum and villainy. I wanted to see that."

Above: Nessie pictured at last? No, it's the hefty Dreadnoughtus. **Right:** Alan Grant (Sam Neill), Maisie Lockwood (Isabella Sermon) and Owen Grady (Chris Pratt) face off against something that's probably not vegetarian.

The other half, which the director dubs a "science thriller", follows the heroes of *Jurassic Park*, legendary trio Alan Grant (Neill), Ellie Sattler (Dern) and Ian Malcolm (Goldblum), back together for the first time since 1993. The idea of it gave Trevorrow tingles: when chaos theory becomes chaos fact, who else would you want in the thick of it? And he didn't want standard guest-star cameos, but fully fledged co-leading roles, with Ellie, Alan and Ian investigating suspicious goings-on at BioSyn, the shady biotech company that triggered Jurassic Park's implosion back in the day. So, like a Nick Fury recruiting a palaeontological Avengers for this prehistoric *Endgame*, he went to work.

Goldblum he already knew; for one thing, he had directed him in a high-octane Super Bowl Jeep ad. Dern he met in Santa Monica for lunch. And at Spain's Sitges film festival, he sat down with Neill, who last reprised the role of Grant for 2001's *Jurassic Park III*, a film in which he dreams about a velociraptor saying, "Alan." "At the beginning of that, he probably was looking at me with a certain amount of scepticism and side-eye," the director says. "I'm not Steven Spielberg. I never will be. And so I really had to start from scratch in convincing these people that I was going to be able to guide them through the return to these characters that mean so much to them." ›







THE PREHISTORY BOYS

SAM NEILL AND JEFF GOLDBLUM FOUND NEW WAYS OF ENTERTAINING THEMSELVES – AND THE WORLD – DURING THE MAKING OF *DOMINION*



THE DUETS

The pair sang a series of duets together, Goldblum on piano and Neill (occasionally) on ukulele, including The Everly Brothers' 'Bye Bye Love' and Kurt Weill's 'September Song'. "Sam is a songbird. He's a nightingale," Goldblum tells *Empire*. "I just do my modest little bit to support him. But he's a great, great musical star and I sit at his feet. Those toes aren't always symmetrical, is all I'll say. Maybe I've said too much."



THE RE-ENACTMENT

Recreating an iconic *Jurassic Park* scene, but with Neill instead of Laura Dern, Goldblum pours water droplets onto the hand of his bewildered-looking friend, in front of a hotel bar. "That was pretty weird," says Neill now. "I'd forgotten it was a reference to the first film." The video, which Goldblum refers to as "dribbling water chaos", ends with an observing Dern laughing, "I've seen this before!"



THE TOYS

For a Neill Instagram post, the pair posed with Funko toys of their *Jurassic* characters — Alan Grant looking noble in his fedora, Ian Malcolm reclining, shirt open and looking strangely sensual. "My oh-so-cute mantelpiece avatar," wrote Neill. "And yours too (more R rated than cute)." Replied Goldblum: "Sam, you love muffin, the R rating is only in your mind!"

Whether he deployed an animated video featuring Mr. DNA to make his case remains unknown. But whatever he did, it worked. Neill, who describes the returning Grant, still stubbornly digging in the desert, as "more grizzled and chewed and gnarled", even makes the Spielberg comparison that Trevorrow won't. "That's the guy he reminds me most of. And I don't say that lightly — I really don't. He's inventive, enthusiastic, always energetic." Dern, too, was impressed. "Colin was keen to really make it matter," she says. "We discover what it would feel like if these three characters came back together, and how they would feel about each other. And it's delicious."

But *Dominion* would not have truly been brought full circle back to 1993 without one further comeback: extensive use of animatronic dinosaurs. Three decades ago, Stan Winston's miraculous practical animals combined with ILM's breakthrough CGI to create movie magic that still mesmerises today. So Trevorrow was determined to make more use of animatronics, which had been deployed only sparingly on the previous two *Jurassic World* films. While it still has a ton of visual effects — it's tough to make a film in which a gigantic Quetzalcoatlus grapples with a plane in mid-air without them — *Dominion*'s sets also teemed with real (fake) wildlife, thanks to the creature workshop overseen by John Nolan, veteran of *The Dark Crystal: Age Of Resistance*.

From this room scuttled, slithered and stomped a huge menagerie of previously extinct beings. The Pyroraptor, red in tooth, claw and feather (yes, for the first time in the *Jurassic* series, there will be feathered dinos). The headbutt-happy Stygimoloch. Velociraptor Blue and her new baby, Beta. The bulldog-like Lystrosaurus. And much, much, much more. "My God, I don't have words for it," says Trevorrow of it all. "So cool."

For the 'legacy' actors, it was a trippy time machine back to the days when they encountered a sickly Triceratops (and accompanying one big pile of shit) on the set of Spielberg's film. "I mean, CGI is a mixed blessing," muses Neill. "I just get exhausted looking at those ones with Transformers and things that stalk the Pacific and destroy cities and stuff. There's no question this is a dinosaur show. And it's these fantastic creatures that have been made that are going to be the stars."

Dern even got somewhat hands-on. "I may have begged at one point to participate in the slime-brushing," she laughs. "The slime-managing..."

IT WAS ALL GOING SMOOTHLY

until, two weeks in, the world broke. The hyper-complex, 97-day schedule, which incorporated filming in a staggering 112 sets and locations — *Fallen Kingdom*, hardly a small independent movie itself, had a total of 56 — kicked off with eight uneventful days in Canada, shooting Chris Pratt and others in the snow. But when the production returned to the UK for a stint of night-shoots, things got hinky. "It was this weird week when sanitiser started appearing on set, and we were laughing about the elbow bumps," recalls producer Alexandra Ferguson-Derbyshire. "That was only a week before shutdown."

In mid-March 2020 — Friday the 13th — the decision was made to pull the plug on this immense Hollywood production. Just as *Jurassic Park*'s shoot had been forced to pause due to Hurricane Iniki sweeping into Hawaii, so *Dominion* was shut down by another, rather larger natural disaster. "T-REX AND TRACE," quipped one tabloid headline at the time. "JURASSIC PARKED," pronounced another. "Give me a hurricane any day," says the movie's other producer, Pat Crowley, remembering those frightening, uncertain early days of Covid.

Ultimately, *Dominion* proved to be the first major movie back in action. The production created a 109-page document laying out a code of protocols, which quickly became the industry standard.



Clockwise from main: Pilot Kayla Watts (DeWanda Wise) and Dr Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) await their fate; Jeff Goldblum as Dr Ian Malcolm; Mamoudou Athie as BioSyn employee Ramsay Cole; Fight Club, dinosaur-style, in the illicit Maltese market.









All visitors to the set were ushered through temperature-test stations. Crew members with foggers patrolled, sanitising every surface, including dinosaur skin. For crowd scenes, each extra was positioned inside their own Plexiglas box. And while some scenes were tweaked, nothing had to be cut, despite rumours online at the time that movies generally were excising moments of physical contact. "Oh, we've got tongues down throats! We have it all," laughs Crowley. "We have so much kissing, you wouldn't believe it," adds Ferguson-Derbyshire with a grin. (They're kidding. We think.)

In fact, the filmmakers claim that the movie only benefited from the tumult. Key crew and cast (including another addition to the series, Mamoudou Athie, who plays BioSyn employee Ramsay Cole; "A very ambitious and forward-thinking young man," hints Athie) hunkered down to quarantine together in a British hotel. There, they used some of their bubble time to workshop scenes and refine dialogue. None more so than Jeff Goldblum, who, like a much more amiable version of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*, raptly studied his script pages, wandered hotel corridors, and got a bit carried away.

"I have a book!" Goldblum gleefully announces to *Empire*, brandishing said document, which is comprised of reams of DIY Ian Malcolm dialogue. "Oh boy, I have a ton of them. I'll just tell you one... We're on a computer trying to fix something or other, and somebody says, 'Uh-oh, it's started flashing Error 99.' And ›



before Mamoudou's character comes in and explains, I was gonna slip in, very quickly, the line, 'Error 99? Is it Barbara Feldon?' Now, Barbara Feldon was an agent in *Get Smart*, a television series from 1962 or something, who played Agent 99. So, a lot of my ideas have to do with references that are totally irrelevant and of no interest or amusement to anybody who could possibly be watching a movie, and inappropriate to the scene. But it tickled me."

It tickled everyone. "I have never seen anyone pitch more dialogue than Jeff Goldblum," laughs Bryce Dallas Howard. "He literally had this piece of paper with these incredible one-liners, and he'd cross them out through the day. You know, some of them will make it in and some of them won't. But a scene is not a scene without a Jeff Goldblum button."

"I would see him taking walks outside, just running the lines over and over again, a month before he was going to do [the scene]," says Trevorrow. "He would always bring extra things in his book that, yes, were often references to 1940s musicals, but he's both hilarious and very powerful. It's not just a comedy role. It's the power of his presence in this movie that I love the most."

It wasn't all work and no play for Team *Dominion*. During their months in the hotel together, they became as close-knit a unit as you can get on a behemoth blockbuster, finding ways to entertain themselves and each other. Neill and Goldblum sang musical duets together (see page 57). Howard and Wise became obsessed with colouring books. "There were two equal adventures — dinosaurs and colouring," Wise declares. "I think they're on the same level." There were Frisbee games aplenty in a nearby park, although Campbell Scott, taking on the chief human-villain role of Dodgson, that BioSyn bad egg seen briefly in the original movie, admits he didn't partake in the disc-flinging: "I was quite dodgy throughout. I was a dodgy Dodgson."

As for BD Wong, back as rogue gene-splicer Henry Wu, he lost himself in knitting. "Laura and Jeff and Sam gave me the most incredible present, a set of knitting needles of the highest end," he remembers. "And then Chris Pratt gave me a stash of wool that has been spun from his own sheep. Knitting is very, very therapeutic. And those gifts are very meaningful."

So, as the world went through its giant collective nightmare, the main players of *Dominion* found themselves living a strange, happy dream. "I did a movie called *10 Years* about a decade ago," remembers Pratt. "Myself and Aubrey Plaza and Oscar Isaac and Anthony Mackie and Rosario Dawson — this massive cast of twentysomethings. It's not a great film, but we all stayed in the same hotel and it was like a summer camp. That kind of vibrant, exciting, communal, shared experience is diminished typically, the higher the budget goes on a movie. But what was beautiful about this film is that it felt like what *10 Years* felt like. It was magical. It was pretty fucking cool." ›

Top: Ellie comes face to snout with an adorable Nasutoceratops. **Right:** Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard) faces the old *Jurassic* dilemma: which scary button to push?



Alamy





DINOS UNCHAINED

JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION ISN'T THE FIRST TIME DINOSAURS HAVE WREAKED URBAN HAVOC



THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS

In Eugène Lourié's 1953 B-movie, an atomic-bomb explosion in the Arctic rouses a frozen Rhedosaurus. Grumpy after being rudely awoken (relatable), big Rhed terrorises New York, infecting civilians and devouring coppers (slightly less relatable).



ONE OF OUR DINOSAURS IS MISSING

Helen Hayes stashes a valuable bit of microfilm in a Brontosaurus skeleton from the Natural History Museum in Disney's 1975 dino caper. Cue silly car chases through a foggy London as Peter Ustinov tails the poorly hidden fossil.



WE'RE BACK! A DINOSAUR'S STORY

Spielberg produced this wackadoodle 1993 'toon where non-violent dinosaurs rock, roll, and run amok in NYC. Nothing says '90s animation quite like a Tyrannosaurus John Goodman and his prehistoric pals singing cheesy, earwormy pop.



THEODORE REX

This infamous 1996 flick sees a talking T-Rex team up with Whoopi Goldberg to investigate 'dinocide' and thwart a mad scientist in near-future America. The film's go-to gag is, "Look! That dinosaur's tail knocked something over." Less T-Rex, more T-Wrecks everything.



THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADÈLE BLANC-SEC

Luc Besson's 2010 action-adventure features a 136-million-year-old Pterosaur terrorising early-20th-century Paris. Sure, the dactyl's deadly, but its moonlit silhouette really gives the City Of Light a certain *je ne sais quoi*. **JORDAN KING**

BACK AT PINEWOOD, IN THE

wee small hours of the night, the Giga malfunction is all but forgotten. Because while that beast remains frozen mid-roar ("Turned out to be the biggest diva out of all us," jests Pratt), smaller creatures have come out to play.

On the set of *Jurassic Park*, Steven Spielberg lamented to *Empire* that he was having a terrible time trying to get the Dilophosaurus to work. "We had tremendous success with the T-Rex, Triceratops, the raptors," he said, "but when we came to the little spitter, which I always anticipated would be the easiest dinosaur of all..." Tonight, there is no such cause for complaint. The Dilophosaurus — that long-necked, frill-collared, surprisingly lethal mischief-maker that has been a fan favourite ever since it splattered Dennis Nedry with death-goop — is back, and stalking nimbly through the undergrowth, to the delight of everyone present. Except this time there are three of them, encircling our gathered heroes and cocking their heads in charming yet deeply sinister fashion.

"It seems like this really innocuous, cute creature... JUST KIDDING, IT'S A KILLER!" laughs Bryce Dallas Howard, who in this scene is the subject of their menacing attention.

"I like their curiosity," adds Trevorrow. "I like that up until they strike, they just seem like they want to know what you're all about. That's the scariest thing about them — they ride this line between terror and friendliness."

Above: Being a dinosaur dentist has its low-points... the gang get up close and personal with a carnivore.
Right: Alan Grant goes for the low-tech torch option.











Above, top to bottom: Geneticist Dr. Henry Wu (BD Wong) studies a giant locust; "Welcome to the party, pal" — Pratt and an animatronic Pyroraptor get acquainted.

Over the preceding months, he has orchestrated high-octane dinosaur thrills which would make that little kid who Alan Grant scared on a Montana dig site in the original movie go sheet-white. A pack of relentless, laser-trained Atrociraptors pursuing a motorcycle-riding Pratt through the streets of Malta. A frenzied Pyroraptor skittering on the surface of a frozen lake, ice crystals forming on its crimson feathers. A herd of Parasaurolophuses galloping alongside horses on a sun-baked plain. Now, with just three nights left of shooting, the filmmaker is eyeball-to-eyeball with a puppet, coaxing it into action. And he couldn't look any happier about it.

"Look to your buddy on the left," he instructs. "Now the right. More tail... Give her a hiss... Let's have some tongue..."

Right here, on this chilly November night, is the *Jurassic* franchise gone back to basics. God creates dinosaurs. God destroys dinosaurs. God creates man. Man creates dinosaurs. Man unleashes dinosaurs on actors. Actors love it.

"To get to interact with that dinosaur was just eerie. It was wonderful," Howard reflects, a huge smile on her face, after the screaming and hissing has ceased. "I might have kissed the animatronic. Just a peck. I was like, 'Is it okay to kiss the Dilophosaurus?'"

A smooch with a venom-spewing carnivore at 4am? Now *that's* chaos.

***JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 JUNE**

OVER THREE DECADES ON, TOM CRUISE HAS FINALLY RETURNED TO ONE OF HIS MOST ICONIC ROLES. AS **TOP GUN: MAVERICK** REVS UP, HE AND HIS CO-PILOTS TELL US HOW THEY'VE CHANGED THE GAME ALL OVER AGAIN

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**



RETURN



FLIGHT



or someone who feels the need, the need for speed, Tom Cruise has taken his sweet damn time making a sequel to *Top Gun*. Admittedly, *Top Gun: Maverick* has been in the can for a couple of years, with Covid delaying the film's release a number of times. But by the time it's finally released this summer, it will have been 36 years since *Top Gun* came out. Back in 1986, director Tony Scott's high-flying movie became a cultural phenomenon, with its stunning flying sequences, influential visuals, and string of sharp one-liners, but it was Cruise who was at the centre of it all, as cocky aviator Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell, deploying the kind of weapons-grade charisma and intensity that saw him quickly become The World's Biggest Movie Star, a title he has yet to relinquish.

Top Gun: Maverick finally sees him return as Mitchell, with a few more miles on the clock, to train a new bunch of Top Gun pilots for the mission of their lives. Which, aptly, also describes the attempts to make the movie; a three-decade odyssey which eventually resulted in a shoot that rewrote the rulebook. Here, Cruise, producer Jerry Bruckheimer, director Joseph Kosinski, writer Christopher McQuarrie and the film's cast break down how their egos wrote cheques that, thankfully, Paramount *could* cash.

FIRING UP

***Top Gun* was the highest-grossing movie of 1986. Predictably, sequel talk began almost immediately. There was one obstacle, though...**

Tom Cruise [Maverick, producer]: I don't make movies just to make movies. Honestly, I never thought I would make *Top Gun* again.



Jerry and I kept talking about, "What are we going to do together?" Jerry was like, "I want to try to make *Top Gun*." I was like, "Jerry, it's never going to happen. I don't know what to say."

Jerry Bruckheimer [producer]: After the first one came out, we tried a bunch of different approaches that didn't quite stick for a number of reasons. I don't think we ever got close.

Cruise: I remember when [*Top Gun* producing team] Simpson/Bruckheimer left Paramount and went to Disney, Paramount wanted me to make 'Top Gun 2'. I said, "Look, I'm not going to do it." Someone even developed a script that I never even read. I would never have made it without [Don] Simpson and Bruckheimer. But everywhere I went, everyone was like, "Dude, 'Top Gun 2'?" People have been asking for it for decades. And I kept pushing it off, pushing it off, pushing it off.

Christopher McQuarrie [writer]: The first conversation I ever had about *Top Gun: Maverick* was 11 years ago, when I was called to a meeting with Tom, Jerry Bruckheimer, [producer] David Ellison and Tony Scott. And then, tragically, Tony passed away and the movie went away with it.

Bruckheimer: We were close. We went to the Top Gun school with Tony, and talked to a bunch of officers and aviators for ideas.

Cruise: We were scouting on Friday together. I was with Tony on Friday, and he passed on Sunday. It was horrible.

McQuarrie: Years later, Jerry showed up on the set of *Mission: Impossible — Fallout* when we were shooting the car chase in Paris. He had come to meet with Tom, and I knew then that *Top Gun* was heating up again.

Kosinski: Jerry had called me for a meeting and gave me a first look at a script they were working on. I had some ideas about where to take it.

Above: "120, 121, 122..." Hangman (Glen Powell), Bob (Lewis Pullman) and Phoenix (Monica Barbaro) are put through their paces by Hondo (Bashir Salahuddin).

Bruckheimer: I think Joe put it all together.

Kosinski: I got half an hour with Tom between set-ups on *Mission* [in Paris]. I had mocked up a poster, and I went in with a title, which was *Top Gun: Maverick*. I wanted the emphasis to be on the character. It wasn't 'Top Gun 2', or 'Top Gun: Legacy'; it was *Top Gun: Maverick*. And at the end of the meeting, Tom picked up the phone and called the studio and said, "We're gonna do this." It's amazing to watch that level of power in action.

Cruise: It was now or never. And I felt we had a foundation of a story.

TAKING OFF

That story — which was in the works before McQuarrie was brought on just a few weeks before production began — was provided by Eric Warren Singer, and then Ehren Kruger, and saw Maverick — now a test pilot, but living a somewhat lonely life that has never quite seen him rise to the heights of his fellow officers — brought back to prepare a group of pilots for a do-or-die mission. Among those pilots is Bradley 'Rooster' Bradshaw, the son of Maverick's long-dead wingman, Goose.

Cruise: I didn't want to do a cover of *Top Gun*. I wanted a fresh story and tone. I wanted to feel and earn this relationship. If you look at what Miles Teller [Rooster] brings, he showed up with the moustache and he just looks like that character. I said to him, "I want to feel Goose and his wife in this character."

Miles Teller [Rooster]: Certainly, being Goose's son, and being reconnected to Maverick, is pretty interesting. Between following in his father's footsteps and this relationship with Maverick, there's a lot to explore.

Kosinski: The notion of Rooster growing up as a naval aviator, and the jeopardy that puts him in... it's a dangerous job. I think that was the thing that really hooked Tom from a story point of view. Using Goose's son as the element that would pull Maverick back into Top Gun seemed like the perfect emotional hook.

McQuarrie: There's an element of tension that runs through the relationship that, if handled wrong, means you become very frustrated with the characters. It's a fine line to walk. Maverick is formed by his past, but he's not haunted by it. He's not the sad guy who never got over the death of his friend, but the death of his friend has created consequences in his life that he never anticipated.

Cruise: I said, "Maverick has still got to be Maverick. Maverick is instinctual. He just can't help putting his foot over the line." To me, that's who that guy is. But it can't be what it was in '86.

McQuarrie: What sequels tend to do is beat the shit out of characters so they can just repeat their same journey of self-discovery. Tom didn't want Maverick to start in a sad place and have to fight his way out of it. He came to it with a very clear sense of, "I want to know that for 30 years while I've gone off and done whatever I did in my life, Maverick stayed Maverick."

A NEW ENGINE

Cruise aside, the only original cast member to return is Val Kilmer, as Maverick's old enemy-turned-ally, Iceman. Otherwise, new characters and relationships were created, including Ed Harris and Jon Hamm as high-ranking, possibly antagonistic officials, and Jennifer Connelly as Penny Benjamin, who was mentioned, but not seen, in the original.

Cruise: When you go from the end of *Top Gun* — "You can be my wingman", "No, you can be *my* wingman" — you now have this wonderful relationship. I really wanted Val to be in the







Left, main: Tom Cruise as Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell, reprising the role that made him The World's Biggest Movie Star.
Top: Show of (G-) force — Greg Tarzan Davis (as Coyote) struggles to keep his lunch down.
Above: Danny Ramirez, Glen Powell, Monica Barbaro, Lewis Pullman and director Joseph Kosinski share a light moment on set.

first *Top Gun* and Tony Scott basically had to go and dog him to get him to do it. This many years later, to have him in [*Maverick*] is very special.

McQuarrie: The most important scenes in the movie are Maverick's scene with Ed Harris, his scenes with Jon Hamm and his scenes with Val Kilmer. They all represent authority. It was really important for Hamm's character to not only not give a shit about Maverick, but to see in Maverick a genuine danger, a lack of responsibility and a lack of order. And everything he says is correct.

Jon Hamm [Cyclone]: I'm the Maverick character, had Maverick decided to play by the rules. I think you could safely say the relationship is a little antagonistic, but I don't think I ever truly yell at him. I don't think it ever gets the spit flying.

Kosinski: Penny Benjamin was one of the things we inherited from previous drafts before I came on. Jennifer and Tom came up through the Hollywood system at the same time, but they had never worked together. I felt they would be a great on-screen couple.

Jennifer Connelly [Penny]: I don't remember ever having met Tom before. We've both been working in movies since we were pretty young. He gives every moment everything he has, which is extraordinary.

McQuarrie: Jen improvised a line. She summarised what I had written in a way I had not written it. She said, "It always ends the same way with us, Pete. Let's not start this time." I didn't write that line. I wish I had. And that tells you the entire story of Maverick and Penny, which is, "I love you, I care about you, I really don't want to do this again, because it always ends in heartache."

Connelly: We immediately get the sense that there's some history between them. They have met at several points during their lives. It's moving and satisfying and romantic.

Kosinski: We can't tell the same story again. It wouldn't be right for Maverick to be going through the same journey as a 56- or 57-year-old man.

McQuarrie: People often ask me who the bad guy is in *Top Gun: Maverick*. It's time. Maverick is travelling at the speed of sound through his life, and doing everything he can to avoid the inevitable consequences of time. That's really what Maverick is up against. The Ed Harris character was originally a tonal repeat of Maverick's confrontation at the beginning of *Top Gun*. I rewrote the scene so Ed Harris is Death. Maverick is essentially on trial for his life in that room.

Kosinski: The beauty of a sequel is that you already understand the history of the character. When he stands at the bar and sees flashes of Goose as he's looking at Rooster, it resonates because we all remember those scenes, like he does.

McQuarrie: The biggest thing was the jacket. Tom was really struggling with the jacket.

Cruise: I was like, "This is ridiculous. I'm not going to wear this!" It was part of the legacy of the first one. How do you know what to leave out and what to add in?

McQuarrie: The jacket was a huge deal to a lot of people. Everybody was saying, "It's a big part of who Maverick is!" I thought, "I could barely describe the jacket to you." It's not Indiana Jones' hat. It's not Superman's cape. It's an aviator jacket.

Cruise: We finally figured out how to put it in. It's a lucky jacket.

McQuarrie: Now, we have him open a closet and go into the back and pull this thing out and wear it for a special occasion. I said to Tom, "You wear the jacket, the jacket doesn't wear you." Maverick is still Maverick, but he's not stuck in the past. ›







NEED FOR SPEED

Stuck in the past is precisely what Cruise didn't want the movie to be when it came to its calling card: the flight scenes. Cruise and Kosinski saw an opportunity to do something truly unprecedented, and do the flying scenes for real. And while each of the actors went up with a pilot, they still had to undergo rigorous training, devised by Cruise himself.

Bruckheimer: In the first movie, we put the actors in the F-14s, and we couldn't use one frame of it, except for some stuff on top, because they all threw up, except Tom. So everything was done on a gimbal. But in this movie, Tom wanted to make sure that the actors could actually be in the F-18s.

Cruise: I started thinking about what we could accomplish, cinematically. I set rules. I'm not going to do the CGI stuff. I really want to, if the Navy will allow us to, shoot these things in a particular way. I've been developing aerial photography and making it more subjective.

Kosinski: I had been looking at these YouTube videos that pilots in the Navy had been posting, putting GoPro cameras inside their jets. I showed that to Tom and said, "If we can't beat this, there's no point in even making this movie."

Cruise: I said to the studio, "You don't know how hard this is gonna be. No-one's ever done it like this before."

Kosinski: We went out to a Navy base, and they gave us an F-18 to poke around the interior. My cinematographer [Claudio Miranda] and I sat there and said, "Do you need that thing to make this fly?" They were like, "No, we can take that out." We cleaned out all the unnecessary gear out of the backseat of an F-18, and then figured out places to stick the camera bodies.

Cruise: I've done more aerial sequences than anyone, pretty much. And I wanted to give the audience that experience of being in the aircraft, and really feeling what it's like.

Kosinski: It's one thing to put Tom up there, who's basically a professional stuntman and a licensed pilot. If the jet caught fire, I know Tom could land it on his own, and everyone would be fine. But when you get to the other actors who are new to this, it's a different thing.

Cruise: We had to make sure that physically, at a certain point, they could do it. If they couldn't do it, they can't make the movie. I didn't have time to get them their pilot's licence, just get them comfortable in the plane. I developed a programme on how to educate everyone. We had to teach the actors about lighting, about cinematography, about editing. I had to teach them how to turn the cameras on and off, and about camera angles and lenses. We didn't have unlimited time in these jets. If they were going up for 20-30 minutes, I had to make sure that we got what we needed.

Teller: There are movies I've done where there have been bootcamps, or some pretty big physical components that took months to train for. But this was so unique. You're going up in these jets for an hour, an hour-and-a-half, and you're not taking in the sights. You had to be incredibly efficient. You had to, a lot of the time, create an





Above: No F-18 to take for a spin? No problem.
Far left: The flight instructor par excellence.
Left: Christopher McQuarrie, Tom Cruise, Joseph Kosinski and Jerry Bruckheimer on set;
Below: Jennifer Connelly as Penny Benjamin.
Bottom: Miles Teller (who plays Rooster, the son of Maverick's one-time wingman, Goose) and Kosinski on set.





imaginary eyeline to where another jet would be, and when you say a line, your face better be telling the story. The sun needs to be at the right angle.

Bruckheimer: First Tom put them in a prop plane, then an aerobatic prop so they can feel some G-force, and then into a jet, where they started to feel heavier G-forces. Then they graduated to the F-18.

Lewis Pullman [Bob]: Right now, we're experiencing one G-force. That's normal. Two G-forces is like someone weighing the same as you, laying on top of you. If I weighed 100 pounds and we're pulling eight Gs, all of a sudden it feels like I weigh 700 pounds.

Bruckheimer: What they have to do to not black out is force blood back into their brain.

Cruise: When you're pulling heavy Gs, man, it compresses your spine, and your skull. It can make people delirious. Some people can't handle it.

Kosinski: Out of a 12- or 14-hour day, you might get 30 seconds of good footage. But it was so hard-earned. It just took a very long time to get it all. Months and months of aerial shooting. We shot as much footage as the three *Lord Of The Rings* movies combined. I think it was 800 hours of footage.

TOUCHING DOWN

Since those hours of footage went into the can, *Top Gun: Maverick* has been sitting on a shelf, waiting for the right moment, with Cruise adamant that a streaming release was never on the cards for something designed as a theatrical experience.

Cruise: To be able to make this film that many years later was pretty cool. And there I am with Jerry, who I've known since I was a kid. It was wonderful.

McQuarrie: I want film snobs to come and see this movie saying, "You know, it's *Top Gun*, it's a money-grab." Okay... don't have chills. I dare you. Don't get a little teary-eyed, I dare you. Don't have sweaty palms in the third act of the movie.

Bruckheimer: One of the most heartwarming things I experienced is when we showed the movie to Tony's brother, Ridley. He was laudatory in his praise for the film, and the kind of care that Tom took to honour Tony throughout the movie. That was foremost in everybody's mind.

Cruise: It was a ride. It was a hell of a ride. I've screened it for some crew and my family, and that was very special. But I have not seen it with an audience yet. I can't wait for it to come out.

***TOP GUN: MAVERICK* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 MAY**

TOP GUN: MAVERICK'S COOLEST CALLSIGNS

***EMPIRE* RANKS THE NEW RECRUITS' FLYEST MONIKERS**

ILLUSTRATIONS **MIKE CATHRO**



1 'HANGMAN'
(GLEN POWELL)

A killer callsign for the squadron's most cold-blooded pilot. Also suggests he might be good at that game where you have to guess all the letters in a word before you get bumped off.



2 'COYOTE'
(GREG TARZAN DAVIES)

Coyote is a sleek, stealthy and deadly *nom de plume*. Or it could be a tribute to the actor Peter Coyote, aka Keys from *E.T.*, which is somehow even better. This may be the only time, though, where the actor's name is cooler than their character's callsign. Can you imagine Tarzan flying into the fray, battle cry at the ready? Make it happen.



3 'PHOENIX'
(MONICA BARBARO)

Now this is a cool name. Dramatic, powerful, graceful. But yes, it does conjure up images of rising from the flames, which is not the sort of thing you want to be thinking about when flying a plane that could interface with the ground at 600mph.



4 'PAYBACK'
(JAY ELLIS)

Sharing a name with a Mel Gibson movie may once have been the height of cool, but not now. Still, Payback could have had it worse — he could have been called The Man Without A Face, Chicken Run or, worst of all, The Beaver.



5 'BOB'
(LEWIS PULLMAN)

Poor Bob. A nondescript name would seem to suggest a nondescript aviator. But don't underestimate him. There are some very cool Bobs — De Niro, Monkhouse, that bloke who terrified us all in *Twin Peaks*. So it might just be a damn fine callsign, after all.



6 'ROOSTER'
(MILES TELLER)

Let's be honest: if you're the son of a lame duck like Goose, you want to go for something that will strike fear into the hearts of your friends and enemies alike. Rooster is not that name. Although he'll be a dab hand at wake-up calls.



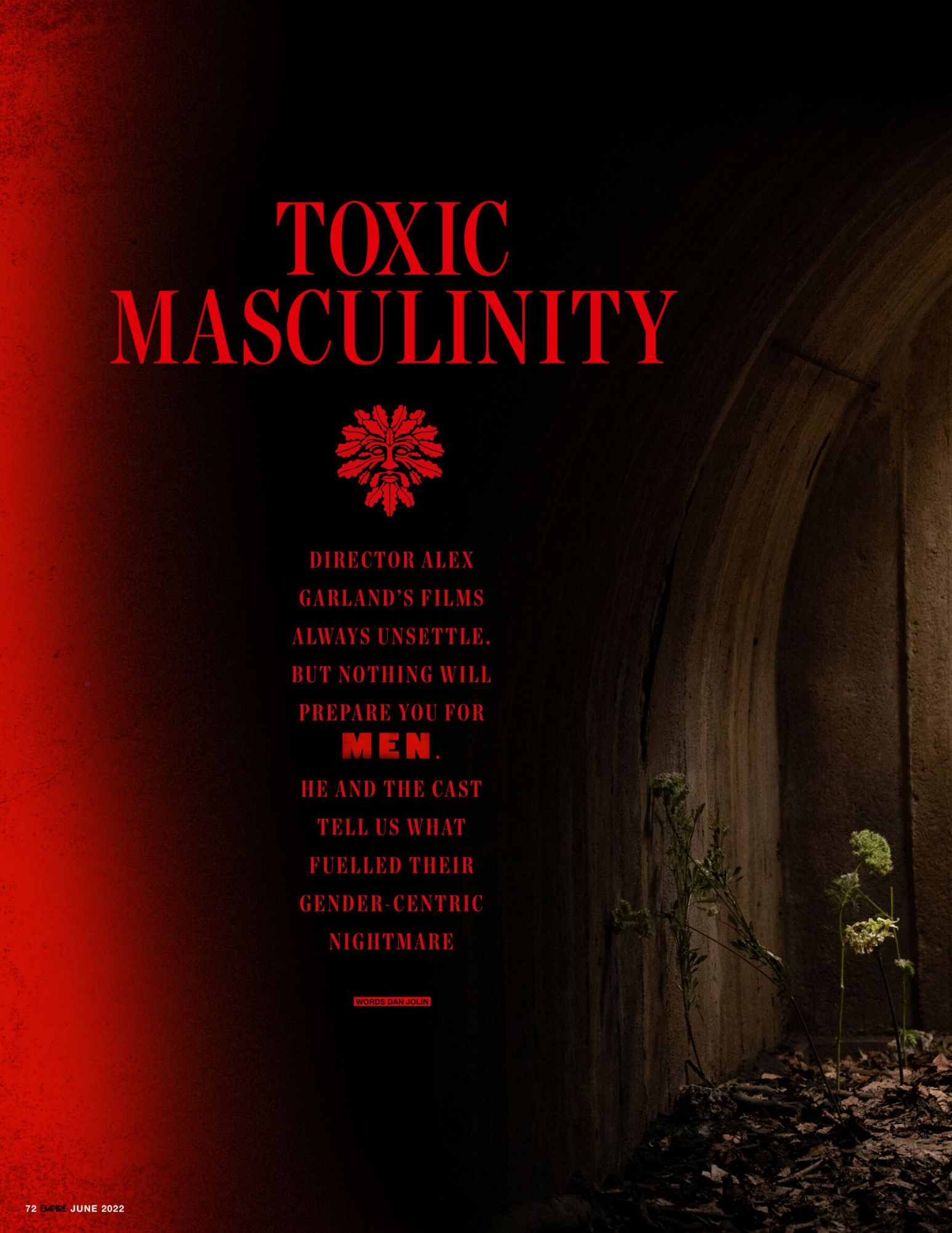
7 'FANBOY'
(DANNY RAMIREZ)

Never mind Bob, this is easily the worst callsign in this group. Suggests the kind of guy who's always late for missions because he was up late the night before, slagging off *The Last Jedi* on 4Chan.

TOXIC MASCULINITY

DIRECTOR ALEX GARLAND'S FILMS ALWAYS UNSETTLE. BUT NOTHING WILL PREPARE YOU FOR **MEN**. HE AND THE CAST TELL US WHAT FUELLED THEIR GENDER-CENTRIC NIGHTMARE

WORDS DAN JOLIN





ALEX GARLAND WANTS TO SET SOMETHING STRAIGHT.

IT'S ABOUT *28 Days Later*, his first screenplay. "I'm aware for years and years there's been debates about that," he says. "Over whether or not it's a zombie movie." The rage-infected horde that speedily lurches around its viral apocalypse are, many (including director Danny Boyle) claim, absolutely not zombies. They're still alive, technically speaking. To the guy that wrote it, however, the film's genre is obvious. "It's a zombie movie," asserts Garland. "Whatever technical discrepancies may or may not exist, they're pretty much zombies." Debate over!

Garland's insistence on this matter is symptomatic of his lifelong affinity for horror. He remembers being a little kid during the '70s, sneaking downstairs after bedtime to quietly devour Hammer movies on his parents' black-and-white TV. His hugely successful debut novel *The Beach* — published when he was 26 — is peppered with horror tropes (Daffy's ghostly, post-suicide appearances, for example, recall Jack in *An American Werewolf In London*). He'd even categorise his last film, the cerebral sci-fi *Annihilation*, as part of the genre. "The sci-fi element of it is quite distant," he says. "But I can point to moments which really are horror scenes, though not classically. It's a psychedelic horror movie."

So when, during a Sunday-morning Zoom call, *Empire* suggests that Garland's latest film, *Men*, must be his first straight-up, pure horror, he's not convinced. "Well, no. Not exactly," he responds, never one to let a question go unquestioned. He does confirm that, after the likes of *Dredd*, *Ex Machina*, *Annihilation* and the 2020 FX show *Devs*, there are no science-fiction elements. "Yeah, it's not sci-fi," he says. "If we're gonna get into subgenres, the subgenre here is folk horror." Garland references Robin Hardy's 1973 classic *The Wicker Man*, which he discovered and loved as a teenager, while praising the films of Ben Wheatley. "It's the horror of rural England. It's certain kinds of churches, certain kinds of forest — the shadows within dark green. That kind of thing."

Pressing Alex Garland for details can be a tricky business. To be fair, at the time of interviewing him in mid-March, he's about to start his next movie *Civil War* ("a war movie") in Atlanta, and is only 24 hours out from completing his final day of post-production on *Men*. It is the first time he's ever talked about the film to an outsider; when we speak, all anyone in the world has seen of it is its elliptical first trailer, featuring Jessie Buckley being stalked and terrorised in the English countryside by tellingly masculine spectres. Details, Garland worries, might dilute the movie's impact. Its horror.

"*Men* leans hard into something I've been doing for years," he explains. "Which is that the large part of a story has nothing to do with the person telling the story. It's about the person *receiving* the story. The way I see it, there are themes which I'm interested in on a personal level, but I'll put little flags on some of them, and the distance between the flags will be quite large. That way, people can just step into those gaps and fill them out with themselves. It sounds weird, I know..."

He does give us something to chew on, even if he's reluctant to elaborate. "When people I've been working with have asked me about what the film is, I say it's a horror movie — but a horror movie about the *sense* of horror. Does that make sense?" ›



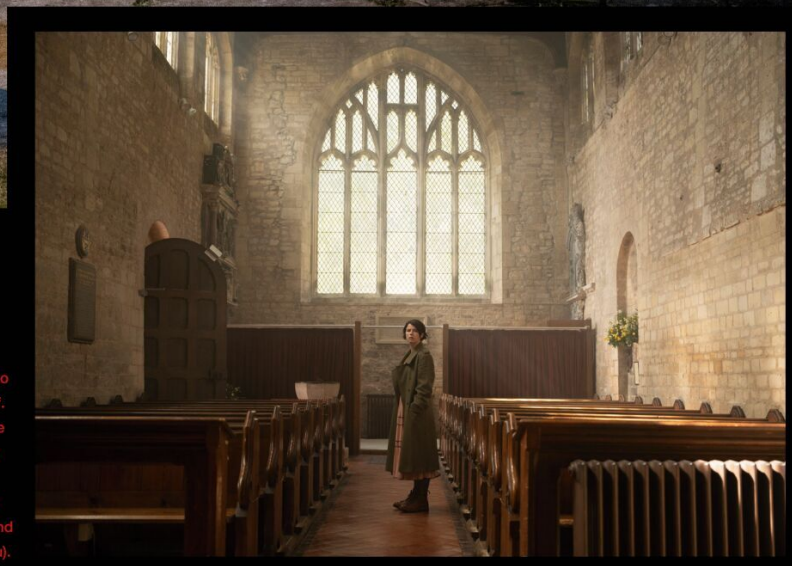
Above: Director Alex Garland chats with star Jessie Buckley on set. **Below, top to bottom:** Yikes! Has the Bible taught us nothing about apples?; Garland fine-tuning a shot on Day Two of filming.









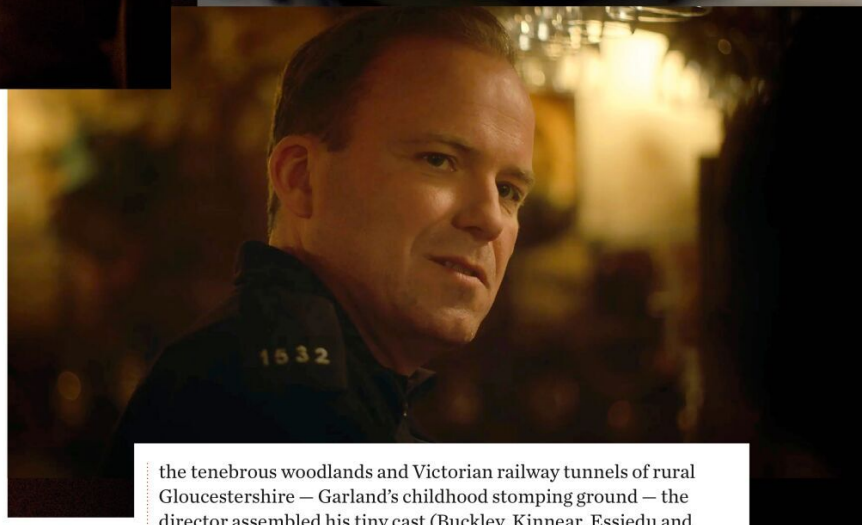




Above: Buckley's Harper, ready to defend herself. **Right:** Can the church offer solace? **Left:** Harper with her husband (Paapa Essiedu).







YEAH, YEAH, YEAH. That does make sense to me!" says Jessie Buckley cheerily, when *Empire* puts Garland's soundbite-of-sorts to her a week later. "This woman is grieving," she explains of her character Harper, who, after the death of her abusive husband (Paapa Essiedu), withdraws to an English-country holiday home to recover. However, she soon realises the nightmare is far from over. "She's left her world to go to a place to grieve, but also to invite the horrors she's been holding within herself into this house. She's gone to reflect on the horror of being terrorised emotionally. So yeah, I guess 'a sense of horror' is right."

We put the description to Rory Kinnear, too. "It's quite a good line, I'll give him that," chuckles the actor, who plays... Well, we'll get to that later. Garland's movie, says Kinnear, "is about the horrors we can create for ourselves out of trauma. How those traumas seep into your everyday life, whether or not you're being provoked by a specific reminiscence of that trauma. And the inescapable nature of 'the other', which most horror films work on, is internalised by Alex within this film."

The clue to the nature of that 'other' — and it's a pretty big clue — is in the film's title, which came to Garland immediately, once the concept that had been percolating in his head for years finally coalesced into a story. "It was the first thing I wrote when I started jotting down my notes," says Garland. "Then I thought, 'Oh no, I'll never be able to use *this* title. There's no way that five films haven't used it already.' But incredibly, it was available." Which was fortunate, because, he adds, "When you watch the film, you'll realise that it was the only title it could have possibly had."

It certainly caught Buckley's attention. "Culturally, we were coming out of a moment where masculine power was in the wrong hands, and was destructive," she says. "So I was interested in this woman who had a relationship to that — not as a victim, but somebody who is searching for a way to move forward and have agency from quite an intense, archetypal experience with manhood."

When asked, Garland can't identify a particular news headline or incident which inspired the script. Yet in the month that production started, March 2021, Sarah Everard was murdered. "So *Men* was not a reaction to that in isolation," he says, "but it's not divorced from it in context. The key thing is, if cinema had existed in the 1860s, you could have made this film in the 1860s. Or you could have made it in the 1950s, or the late '70s. It's not time-specific at all. It's not even as localised as 'women have always been killed by men'. It's broader than that."

While Garland is understandably disinclined to delve into the film's central theme for viewers, there is no doubt he wanted his actors to explore and fully engage with it. Before shooting began in the tenebrous woodlands and Victorian railway tunnels of rural Gloucestershire — Garland's childhood stomping ground — the director assembled his tiny cast (Buckley, Kinnear, Essiedu and Gayle Rankin, who plays Harper's best friend) at his father's cottage near Cheltenham, for two weeks of rehearsals.

It was a fascinating and valuable process, says Essiedu: "We spent a long time talking about our own experiences, about what masculinity means to us, and about how masculinity has impacted both men and women historically and in a contemporary setting."

With its intimate nature, four-person cast, close-to-home setting and location in a genre that, typically, is inexpensive to execute, *Men* fulfilled Garland's desire to create something more stripped-down and modestly scaled than his last project, the eight-part sci-fi thriller *Devs*. "I think often, you're to an extent reacting against the thing you did previously," the director says. "And *Devs* was big and sprawling. This is the opposite. It's small and really tight."

Empire wonders if *Men* is his lowest-budget movie yet. "No, no, no. *Ex Machina* was cheaper!" Partly, he admits, its higher cost was due to Covid protocols and "boring" reasons. But the shoot was also, he reveals, no walk in the woods. "Bizarrely, on a technical level, it was the hardest movie I've ever worked on."

The explanation for this brings us back to the film's title, the reason why it could have no other. And also to who Rory Kinnear plays, exactly. Because the answer to that is both complicated, and simple. He plays the title role.





PUT SIMPLY, EVERY male Harper meets after her traumatic experience with her husband is portrayed by Kinnear, whether it's the genial country gent who owns her holiday home, the lank-haired vicar, the local bobby, or even a creepy young boy. *He* is the 'other'. *He* is the threat. All of them.

"I play nine or ten different characters," Kinnear explains. "Some are actively threatening, some of them seem fairly benign, but all of them personify different aspects of the male tendency to belittle or spite or slight. And each one had to be as fully rounded as the next, even though some of them have a very limited amount of screen-time. The threat they represent, or their lack of self-awareness, had to come from a specific place within them."

This isn't the first time Kinnear has tackled multiple characters. On TV, he's played twins twice (in *Inside No. 9* and *Our Flag Means Death*) and portrayed different characters in the *Penny Dreadful* universe. "It's a weird niche to have as an actor, but there you go," he laughs. "It means I'm half the price, basically!"

When he first discussed the idea with Garland, he decided to resist it becoming a "showy thing", especially as it would require a lot of prosthetics for many different looks. "We were trying desperately to make sure it wasn't *The Klumps*," Kinnear says. Most importantly, "I didn't want to make it about me being all these characters, rather than about Jessie's character. So it's less about it being an acting showcase and more about trying to embed all these characters in a credible world. I wanted to make sure they seeped out of the scenery as much as the countryside itself."

One of the most technically challenging scenes involved Harper walking into a pub, where the landlord and every punter is played by Kinnear, in one form or another. "That turned into a head-fuck," says Garland. "We were doing really old-fashioned shooting techniques, where, say you've got three people in the same frame, you're swapping out two of them [for stand-ins] and it becomes a sort of exponential math problem with the eyelines and the angles. There was a lot to keep track of, not least for Rory, because Rory was playing very different characters with different voices, different ages, within a single scene."

Kinnear doesn't give the slightest impression he might have suffered for his art, even though Essiedu remembers him looking "crazed" after "three or four weeks of night shoots covered in goo and fake blood and stuff". In fact, Kinnear quickly deflects any suggestion that making *Men* might have put him through the mill.

"I think it was probably trickier for Jessie than anyone," he insists. In the pub scene, for example, "I was playing each new person just the once, for half a day, and we had stand-ins dressed as the characters I wasn't playing at the time, reading my lines. Whereas Jessie was doing the same thing for three days and imagining me."

However, like Kinnear, Buckley has no complaints about the experience. "Rory's one of the funniest people I've ever worked with," she says. "The amount of times I had to look away from the camera because I was laughing too much at him. He's so naughty. Which is the best, when you're doing a horror film. And it was amazing to see all these characters he and the hair-and-make-up team created. Every one had its own little nuances, and Rory would just step into them."

Her favourite was Geoffrey, the ruddy country gent introduced in the second trailer. "Whenever Geoffrey came to set, it lightened the mood. Everybody loved Geoffrey. Rory brought a lightness to this quite dark subject of manhood and horror, which is part of the film's unnerving quality. It's like, there's nothing overtly wrong, but there's something slightly off. He's such an incredibly smart actor like that."

Above, clockwise from far left: Rory Kinnear takes on multiple roles, including Harper's holiday-home landlord, a guilt-tripping vicar and a hostile copper. **Below and below right:** Harper, alone.

As it is Harper seeing all these Rory-faced men, it's no surprise to learn that Buckley is in virtually every scene of the film. "I'm pretty sure it's every *second* of the film," says Essiedu. She has to carry the movie, and constantly convey the grief, trauma and terror that Harper is experiencing. And given her journey is essentially our journey as the audience, *Men* promises to hit hard.

"IT WAS A visceral experience for me to read the script," says Buckley, who hasn't seen the finished movie yet, "so I can imagine whatever comes through for people when they watch the film, it will be visceral."

You can get a strong sense of *Men* — of what an Alex Garland folk-horror film will look and feel like — just from Buckley's research list. "Writing down my dreams. Reading fairy tales and Dante's *Inferno*. Finding paintings by Munch and Tracy Emin. Going back to the pagan myth of the Green Man and what that means." She'd ask Garland questions like, "What happens when screams are silent? What does that emotionally and cinematically look like? How much of the world is actually screaming silently, within themselves?" It certainly sounds like she needed those moments of levity with Kinnear, in all his many guises — including, interestingly, the leafy-visaged Green Man himself (the ancient forest god of life, death and rebirth whose sinister features adorn many medieval British churches and buildings), which required a six-hour transformation process.

"I knew we were making something complex and rich and provocative," says Kinnear. "You did get a sense that this was something quite exciting and interesting and unusual. It's definitely asking interesting questions with no definite answers."

Which is entirely Garland's intention, of course. Like his other work, *Men* will exhibit an opacity that some will find engrossing, and others frustrating, or even alienating. Garland accepts that. The big question of why Harper is seeing the same face in all these different males, from boys to mythic totems, for example, is one he won't come close to answering. And neither will the film.

"It does not answer that at all," confirms Garland. "Now, I've got my own sense of it, but my own sense of it fucks with the experience of watching the film, and by providing an answer, I've ruined the function of the film. One way or another, it will deliver on the title." But the exact way in which it delivers will be entirely up to the viewer. There is no *Men*-splaining here.

***MEN* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 20 MAY**





INTO THE LIGHT

WORDS **BOYD HILTON** // PHOTOGRAPHY **RAMONA ROSALES**

FROM *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND *THE INVISIBLE MAN* TO HER NEW TV DRAMA *SHINING GIRLS*, **ELISABETH MOSS** SPECIALISES IN PLAYING TRAUMATISED CHARACTERS. AS SHE TELLS *EMPIRE*, THOUGH, HER WORK IS BRIGHTER AND MORE HOPEFUL THAN IT SEEMS



ELISABETH MOSS IS NOT AFRAID OF THE DARK.

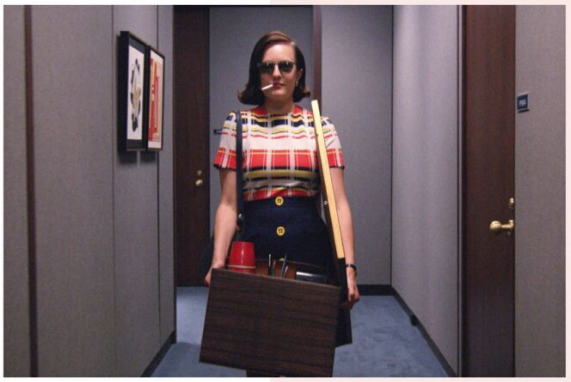
In a break from her role as violently enslaved and abused June, aka Offred, in ongoing dystopian TV epic *The Handmaid's Tale*, she chose to play... the survivor of a terrifying knife attack, whose experience is so painful, her entire world turns into a bewildering puzzle where none of the pieces fit. This character, known as Kirby, is the focus of intense, eight-part psychological thriller *Shining Girls*, which Moss' new production company has made for Apple TV+.

Kirby follows on from the relentlessly tortured Cecilia in writer/director Leigh Whannell's masterful 2020 movie version of *The Invisible Man*; before that, there were two series of Jane Campion's off-kilter crime drama *Top Of The Lake*, in which Moss played Robin Griffin, a detective who not only investigated cases of sexual assault, but had herself been assaulted. Yet the remarkable thing about this run of characters seemingly defined by their suffering is that they are all so different from one another. As different, in fact, as they are from the first defining role of Moss' career — the indomitable Peggy Olson in *Mad Men*.

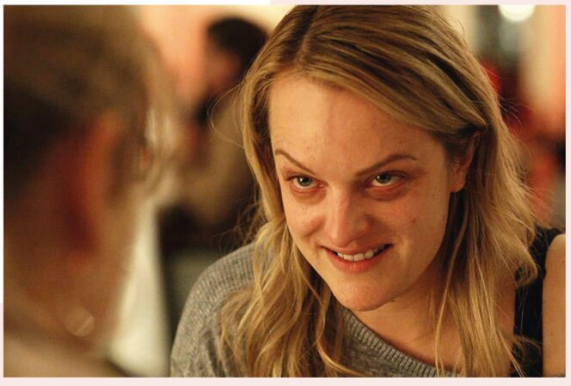
As she tells us, though, the lighter roles she plays are not necessarily more fun. In frank and eloquent detail over a Zoom call from Toronto, where she's deep in production on Season 5 of *The Handmaid's Tale*, she explains why she'll always be drawn to the pain.

Kirby in *Shining Girls* is the latest of many roles you've played where the character has experienced terrible trauma. Is it secretly









Top to bottom: Moss as the iconic Peggy Olson in the final season of *Mad Men*; Taking an entirely different tack in Jane Campion's *Top Of The Lake*; As domestic -abuse survivor Cecilia in Leigh Whannell's new take on *The Invisible Man* (2020).

fun to play someone going through all that?
Yeah, I was talking to a bunch of actors about this last night over dinner and we were saying how it's so hard to describe why we are attracted to those roles, and that in fact, it's just more fun! I am very aware that this kind of role is what I really like. I think a lot of it has to do with the juxtaposition between the trauma and the light. It's never just about the trauma. It can't just be somebody who's been through something horrible. It's about, "What is the struggle there? What is the way out of the darkness? What is the light that's pulling her the other way? What is the complexity?" That's what I'm really looking for.

And is part of the satisfaction that these characters eventually get a moment of huge catharsis — the triumph after so much extreme adversity?
Absolutely, and that's what it's all about: getting to *that* place, and that's what I love so much about television, why I keep going back to it. That chance to really explore and develop a character and have them go through years of their life. I love movies too, of course, but it's a different animal. You have 90 minutes or two hours to do that, so it's just a different structure. I truly love getting to do it for eight hours, or seven years.

Kirby in *Shining Girls* is physically closed in. Did it take you a while to develop how you're going to play her?
Thank you for noticing that. It was an instinctive thing more than anything else. Just one of the things that I was excited about [with] this show from the very beginning was that exact idea. I read the first episode when I was in the middle of shooting Season 3 of *The Handmaid's Tale*, so I was playing this character [June] who was really finding her strength. So the idea of playing somebody who hadn't found that yet, and who was having a different reaction to the trauma, was really exciting. Kirby is someone who doesn't want to be touched. She doesn't want people to look at her. She wants to blend in and disappear into the walls.

Did you have lots of discussions about how to portray the horrific and violent aspects of the story?
Yes, we were really careful. There were a lot of conversations about how we didn't want it to be too explicitly violent, because there's enough of that out there, and that wasn't the kind of story we were telling. The book is a lot darker, I think.

It's still pretty dark in a kind of David Fincher way, though.
I'm so glad you said that because I was about to say, hopefully we were veering more into the Fincher kind of world. We had so many *Seven* conversations, and we had so many Fincher visuals to look at — he was a huge inspiration. We were really hoping to lean into the tension and the unsettling tone and the darkness. It's shocking, but it's not all blood and gore.

Was it deliberate that most of the writers, directors and producers on this show are women?
Yes, and no. I'm a big fan of having a lot of women on a team, obviously, but then it was also something that just happened really naturally. It did feel like it was a story that would very much be served by a female team. But at the same time, it was just that we had the best people to do this and they all happened to be women.

You worked with Jane Campion on two seasons of *Top Of The Lake*. How important would you say she has been in your life and career?
She is a such a figure in my life. In so many ways. There's a very strong and multi-layered relationship there. She was very supportive of me starting to direct things as well [Moss has directed some episodes of *The Handmaid's Tale*, as well as *Shining Girls*]. She gave me my first opportunity outside of *Mad Men*. Robin [the detective in *Top Of The Lake*] was so different from Peggy [in *Mad Men*], to the point where I almost didn't even get the chance to audition because if you looked at Peggy, there's no way you'd get Robin out of that. But Jane saw something and allowed me to audition. Doing that show proved to me, let alone anyone else, that I could do something different and be the actor that I've always wanted to be. ›

And you were originally due to play Kirsten Dunst's role in *The Power Of The Dog*. How do you feel about missing out on that experience?
I mean, I'm not gonna lie. I wish... I wish... I wish... I could have done it. Of course. It's hard because I really, really wanted to do it and Jane and I talked about it for a couple of years. But she and I have been very kind to each other in that process, knowing that sometimes these things just don't work out, and it's not really anyone's fault. I was actually so happy that Kirsten was doing it because I respect her so much as an actress. I think if that role had gone to somebody that I didn't love, I don't think I would have liked that. And obviously it's such a beautiful film. In the end I'm happy that it happened the way that it did, but I would say my only desperate desire is to work with Jane again.

Maybe 'Top Of The Lake 3'?
Yeah! [*Laughs*] I've told her multiple times, "Just say the word. Let me know what country to be in, and I'll be there."

***Mad Men* is one of the greatest TV shows ever. Did you have any idea that it was going to be that type of phenomenon?**
God, no, not at all. Nobody was really watching it to start with. It was a really slow burn. There were long scenes of people talking and it took its time, staying really loyal to its original tone. I think the first moment when we felt that people really liked us was the Golden Globes [in 2008], which happened to be during the writers' strike. So nobody actually went to the ceremony, and we ended up winning Best Drama Series. And it was shocking to us. Really shocking. We had this party at Chateau Marmont, because nobody was going to the ceremony. Just like nobody's going to the Golden Globes now. We were ahead of our time [*laughs*].

What was it like being 17 years old and acting in *The West Wing*?
It was absolutely astonishing. Brad [Whitford] and I talk about this a lot because now I work with him in *Handmaid's* in a completely different way, which is so fun, and he and I have become really close. But at the time, I was 17, surrounded by all these real actors. They came from theatre, they had done a lot of movies, so I looked up to them so much. But it was not intimidating because they were so nice. They were kind and friendly and normal, and that in itself was very inspiring. It taught me how a show is supposed to be.

How do you look back on the experience of being in *The Invisible Man*, and did you get much feedback from women about its gaslighting theme?
I have had a lot of women — and men, actually — come up to me and talk about what that film meant to them, and what's been interesting is it's a real mix. Some people responded to the gaslighting analogy of the movie and said that that's exactly how it feels. And then I've had people who just love it as a horror movie, and even some people who thought it was too scary.

Are you aware of how the 'restaurant scene' has become a totally classic moment?
Yeah, the film was screened for me on my own in a cinema in New York, and I just remember being so impressed with how everything worked the way that we wanted it to, and it was so beautifully done by [director] Leigh [Whannell]. And I remember watching the restaurant scene, which was quite funny to shoot. The actress who plays my sister had this prosthetic thing on her neck, so she's sitting there with her neck open and we're laughing and chatting and joking, and then you see the final product and you're transported. That's something that doesn't always happen. That restaurant scene is *the* scene, though, you're right. And I love that.





Top: June (Moss) and Janine (Madeline Brewer) attempt to escape Gilead in Season 4 of *The Handmaid's Tale*; Moss as Kirby Mazrachi in Apple TV+'s time-shifting crime-thriller *Shining Girls*.

You were also in Jordan Peele's *Us*, another powerful horror film. What do you like so much about the genre?
What's so cool is that horror films often work as a Trojan Horse to explore social commentary. You find a statement of some kind, wrapped up in this ball of horror, and Jordan of course is a great example of that. I love the genre anyway and I don't get scared easily.

You're making the fifth season of *The Handmaid's Tale* now, but do you know how and when it will end?
No idea. I'm not even being cagey or secretive. I think there's an idea of when the ending should come. But obviously it's also not completely up to us.

Without spoiling anything, what can you tell us about the trajectory of the new season?
Well, what we're dealing with right now in the episodes we're filming is: what can June do with all that anger? And is there a good use for it? Is it something she's supposed to let go of? Is there some place she can put it that would be useful? And in general I'd say this season is huge, much to the chagrin of our budget. It's not a boring season, that's for sure.

As for future projects, are you still going to be playing Francis Ford Coppola's wife Eleanor in the movie about the making of *The Godfather*?
I hope so. I think it's a scheduling thing. In fact, thanks for the reminder; I'm actually going to check on that! I hope I get to do it because it's a really great script.

And then there's Taika Waititi's football drama *Next Goal Wins*, which is due soon. That seems like a very different kind of role for you... less trauma?
It was probably the most pure fun I've ever had on a set, ever. Taika likes to enjoy himself, and he's such a genius that he can manage to have the most fun set in the world and then also make really, really good work. Plus Michael Fassbender turns out to be one of the funniest people, which I had no idea about, and his improv skills were incredible. It's going to be fabulous.

And are you still looking for more roles that are challenging and discomforting?
Oh yes, but in fact, working with Taika was out of my comfort zone. The first thing I had to do was walk into a locker room full of men. And Michael Fassbender. Like, enough said. And then all of a sudden we were rolling. I was fucking terrified. And I've been doing this for 33 years. I got over it, though. I was okay.

SHINING GIRLS IS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 29 APRIL

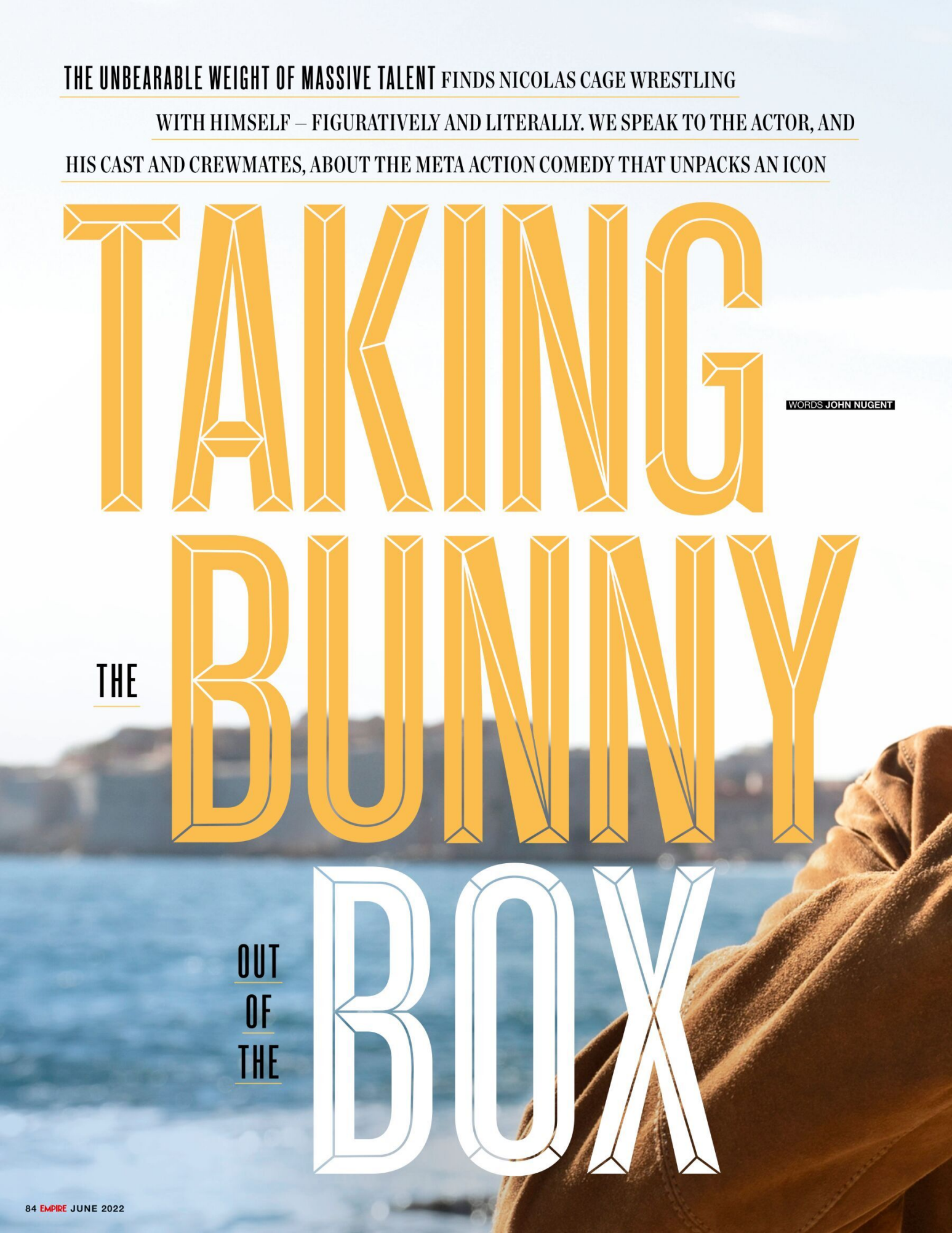
August Images



THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT FINDS NICOLAS CAGE WRESTLING WITH HIMSELF – FIGURATIVELY AND LITERALLY. WE SPEAK TO THE ACTOR, AND HIS CAST AND CREWMATES, ABOUT THE META ACTION COMEDY THAT UNPACKS AN ICON

TAKING THE BUNNY OUT OF THE BOX

WORDS: JOHN NUGENT







NICOLAS CAGE IS MAKING OUT WITH himself. Back in the summer of 2020, at the height of the pre-vaccine pandemic, not many people are kissing in the workplace (save for the odd government minister). But on a soundstage in Budapest, on the set of *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent*, surrounded by a crew wearing masks, Nicolas Cage is planting a massive wet smacker right on his own face.

"That was actually just a peck on the cheek, as scripted," co-writer and director Tom Gormican says now. In the film, Cage plays 'Nick Cage', a fictionalised version of himself; in the scene, he is haunted by a vision of his younger, more deranged self, known as 'Nicky' (also played by Cage, with de-ageing CGI). As Gormican recalls: "Nick came in and was like, 'I think I would really like to French-kiss myself.'" It's the kind of sentence that could only be heard on a Nicolas Cage set.

The actor also suggested the follow-up line of dialogue: "You tell 'em Nick Cage smooches good!" Both the kiss (which required the body double playing Cage to wear a plastic face guard, to remain Covid-secure) and the line made it into the final film. Co-writer Kevin Etten couldn't believe what he was seeing. "I just died," he says. "I was like, 'Oh, my God, *yes*. Please.' Never in a million years would I have gone there in my head. But it was such a great idea. It was so funny."

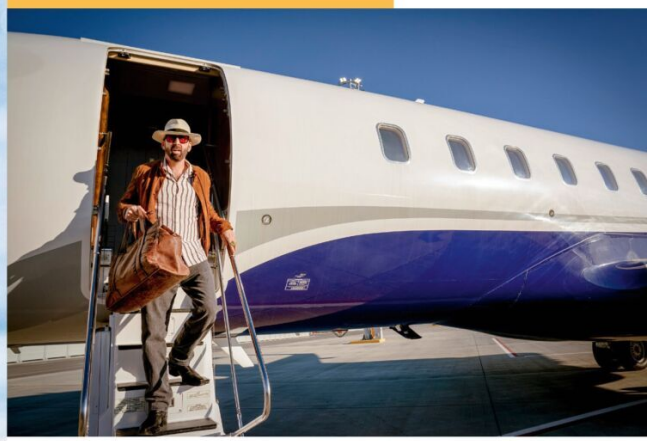
To Cage, it made total sense. Logical, even. "It was like, 'This is such a symbolic microcosm of everything that is happening to me right now,'" Cage says now to *Empire*, reflecting on his moment of self-love. "Because I'm making a movie where I'm playing myself. Which is effectively kissing myself. I'm making out with myself. And that's exactly what's going on. Anyone that understands symbolism knows what I'm doing there. It's the ouroboros — the snake eating its own tail."

On more than one occasion, *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent* has been described as 'The Most Nicolas Cage

Above: Cheers! Fading movie star Nick Cage (Nicolas Cage) with criminal mega-fan Javi (Pedro Pascal). **Top right:** The reluctant party guest arrives. **Right:** 'Life' mirrors art as the actor finds himself mid-thriller.









Film Of All Time'. When the project was first announced back in 2019, one website went with the headline "Nicolas Cage In Talks To Play Nicolas Cage In Movie About Nicolas Cage". There is a *lot* of Cage in this film, almost certainly more than in any other. It's a buddy comedy about two unlikely friends, an action thriller about a CIA kidnapping plot, a family drama about a daughter who just wants her dad, and a meta-satire about one of the biggest movie stars in the world. Yet for Cage — an actor who has done it all, and seen it all, and made out with them all — it very nearly didn't happen.

For a man who has said said yes to a lot of things over the years, it might surprise you to hear that when the opportunity to play 'Nick Cage' came about, Nicolas Cage initially said no. "Three or four times," he confirms. "I didn't want to have any part of it. It's kind of like breaking the fourth wall. Actors don't want to break the fourth wall. We always want to be able to hide behind characters. And I was nervous that they were going to ridicule the so-called Nick Cage."

He had in fact been asked to play himself before, for a project in the early '00s titled *Action #1* about his prized vintage Superman comic, and had turned it down for that very reason. He was ready to ignore *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent* just as swiftly — until he received a heartfelt missive from Gormican, promising him that this was not a film looking to mock the actor.

"I wrote him a long letter," Gormican says. "It was important to me and Kevin, my co-writer, to say: 'We're *fans*. This is a tribute to an amazing body of work.'" It was a comedy, he explained, and playful, sure, but also a celebration of all things Cagey. There are nods to his back catalogue peppered throughout, from classics like *Con Air* and *Leaving Las Vegas* to deeper cuts like *Guarding Tess* and *Mandy*. (Also, *The Croods 2*.) "That's what I communicated to him in this letter: 'You're the most interesting actor, because you've kind of done every genre — and this project encapsulates all those things. You get to do every genre within one film, if that's interesting to you.'"

What Gormican also hoped might pique Cage's interest was the chance to play with his own myth — to confront the internet memes that sometimes threaten to overshadow his actual work. "I thought it would appeal to Nick to talk about the idea of someone's identity being litigated in public," Gormican recalls. "I said, 'Wouldn't it be interesting to take the reins of that in narrative form by making a movie where there are things that are real or things that are not real? We could present a version of Nick Cage that can complicate that — that can *add* to the mystique.'"

Gormican and Etten sent their letter to Cage's representatives, and waited nervously for a response. The pair — who met working on network television in the US, writing for sitcoms like *Ghosted* — had spent over a year on the screenplay, immersing themselves in all things Cage in order to authentically mimic his unique voice. They had combed through his vast filmography, read his magazine profiles, and watched his talk-show appearances. "There was so much ›

to mine," says Etten. "Hearing [Cage] speak so eloquently about his process and his craft and his ideas on Expressionism versus naturalism — he's thought about all that in a deep way."

Still, they had clearly committed one of the cardinal sins of screenwriting: baking an A-lister into their script without any guarantee he would participate. "We didn't have a back-up," smiles Gormican now. "There was no-one else who could slot in. Because there's no-one else like him." The entire project would live or die on Cage's response.

Cage mulled it over. Intrigued by the chance to take on his own legend, excited at the prospect of playing an "irreverent, arrogant, obnoxious" younger version of himself, and touched by what he considered a "a very enthusiastic, passionate, genuine, heartfelt letter", he eventually said yes, to the huge relief of Gormican and Etten. That led to a more existential question, though: where does Nicolas Cage end and 'Nick Cage' begin?

The filmmakers and actors involved are at pains to make something clear: *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent* is no documentary. The character played by Nicolas Cage in the film is fictional. And *yet*.

"There's some fact in there," Cage acknowledges. For starters, Fake Cage, like Real Cage, is an obsessive cinephile. "It doesn't matter what walk of life you're in," he affirms. "If you want to talk about cinema, compare notes about *Paddington 2* or *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari* — well, that is something that I would want to do in my own life."

The film also portrays him as a highly dedicated actor, something he recognises. "This idea in the film, that I never had a career, I only had work — I agree with." Sharon Horgan, who plays Cage's ex-wife, was a first-hand witness to that diligence during the cast and crew read-through. "Everyone was on Zoom," she recalls, "and then Nicolas Cage comes online, wearing sunglasses and a luminous pink leather jacket. And then I realised: he has *learnt the whole film*." While the other actors were fumbling their way through script pages, Cage was already off-book, delivering directly to the laptop camera. "It's so unusual in a read-through for someone to know their entire part, but he had 100 per cent learnt the whole thing. I was blown away. It was an incredible performance."

Perhaps the most significant reflection of the real Cage in the film, however, is about the direction his career has gone. The 'Nick Cage' character is down on his luck, failing to book the plum roles, and considering retirement. As he repeats throughout the film, "I'm gonna get this next role, and then I'm back — not that I went anywhere." The real Cage never went anywhere, either; he's barely taken a day off work in decades. But he's had something of a conscious uncoupling with mainstream Hollywood lately. "There's a little bit of a creative-rebirth idea present throughout the script," says Gormican. "People always ask us, 'Does Nick *get it*?' Yeah, he has some perspective on that. He was once this global action star. This is his first major studio film in 13 years."

Cage is candid and philosophical about his mid-2010s run of straight-to-streaming films, and how this marks something of a welcoming back to the fold. "This is a return to a space that I have not been a part of since 2009, yes," he says. "But I don't look at it as a comeback. Because I never stopped. I just went back to my roots." Unlike the on-screen Cage, he has no regrets over how things panned out — his work in indie films led to some of the best reviews of his career for last year's *Pig*, which he calls "one of my two favourite movies I've ever made" (he has recently named *Vampire's Kiss* as the other).

Yet he admits they haven't all been hitters. "I got to the point where I realised that filmmaking is collaborative and you can't control every element of it," he says. "If I could get at least two good scenes, emotionally, then I would feel satisfied with that. I liken it to a rock album. It's like, 'Well, the whole album doesn't work — but I do like that one catchy tune.'"

Take his infamous 2006 remake of *The Wicker Man*, for example. "Which I still contend is a fun movie," Cage says. "People seem to enjoy it more thinking it was unintentionally funny, but whatever, the audience is never wrong." It was Cage's idea to throw in a little nod-and-wink to the YouTube-famous "Not the bees!" scene in *Unbearable Weight*. "I thought, 'Okay, let's play with their Frankenstein's Monster. Let's play with the "Not the bees" meme.'" By playing a fake version of himself, Cage is taking on his more outlandish public persona — or at least the one the meme-merchants like to exaggerate. "I'm trying to deconstruct it, or play with it, or find a way to acknowledge it, in what is hopefully an entertaining format."

To help with that deconstruction, the film sets Cage against an obsessed fan. "A lot of the things that we wanted to say were said through Pedro Pascal's character, Javi," Gormican says. "You know — 'Why aren't you the giant movie star anymore? You're the greatest actor of all time!'" In the film, Javi eventually takes him into his Cage shrine, which houses, among other memorabilia, a lifesize waxwork model of *Face/Off*'s Castor Troy, complete with golden guns, the chainsaw from *Mandy*, nerve-agent props from *The Rock* and a sequinned pillow adorned with Cage's face.

For Pascal, playing a Nicolas Cage superfan meant that "I didn't have to do any research," he says. "[Cage] has been like my creative upbringing." Another draw, for him, came in its action-comedy approach, a throwback to Cage's own work in that arena. "It is that kind of '90s romp, as well as having this meta subject matter," says Pascal. "I just love it when genres take those risks and mix together." His character



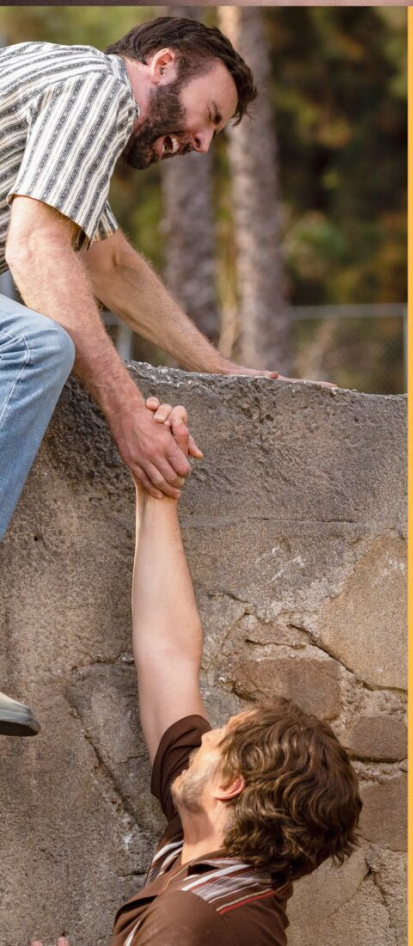




Below, top to bottom: Sharon Horgan as Nick's former wife, Olivia; Birthday party blues. **Bottom right:** Giving Javi a helping hand.



Here: "I'm a rather big celebrity, get me out of here!" **Below, top to bottom:** Still got it; Actor turns accomplice; Don't try this at home, folks.









sends them both down a rabbit-hole of car chases, gunfights and action — exactly the sort of thing Cage was getting up to in the '90s. "It has the air of nostalgia to it."

But Javi and 'Cage' also get to just geek out together, bonding over a shared a love of cinema, which gave Pascal ample opportunity to gush himself. "It is stepping into something that is much closer to me," he says. "Instead of brooding or shooting people. The exposed goofball is a little bit more me."

Pascal really is a superfan. As far as he is concerned, Cage is more than just an actor. He's an icon. The film plays with that tension — the larger-than-life eccentric megastar, and the quiet, introspective student of his craft. In one scene, Cage declares, "I'm healthy when I'm working, I'm an actor" — to which the younger Nicky angrily responds, "No, you're a fucking movie star, and don't you ever forget that!" But which is it? Is Cage an actor, or a movie star? Could this goofy meta-comedy movie be, in fact, a battle for Nicolas Cage's soul?

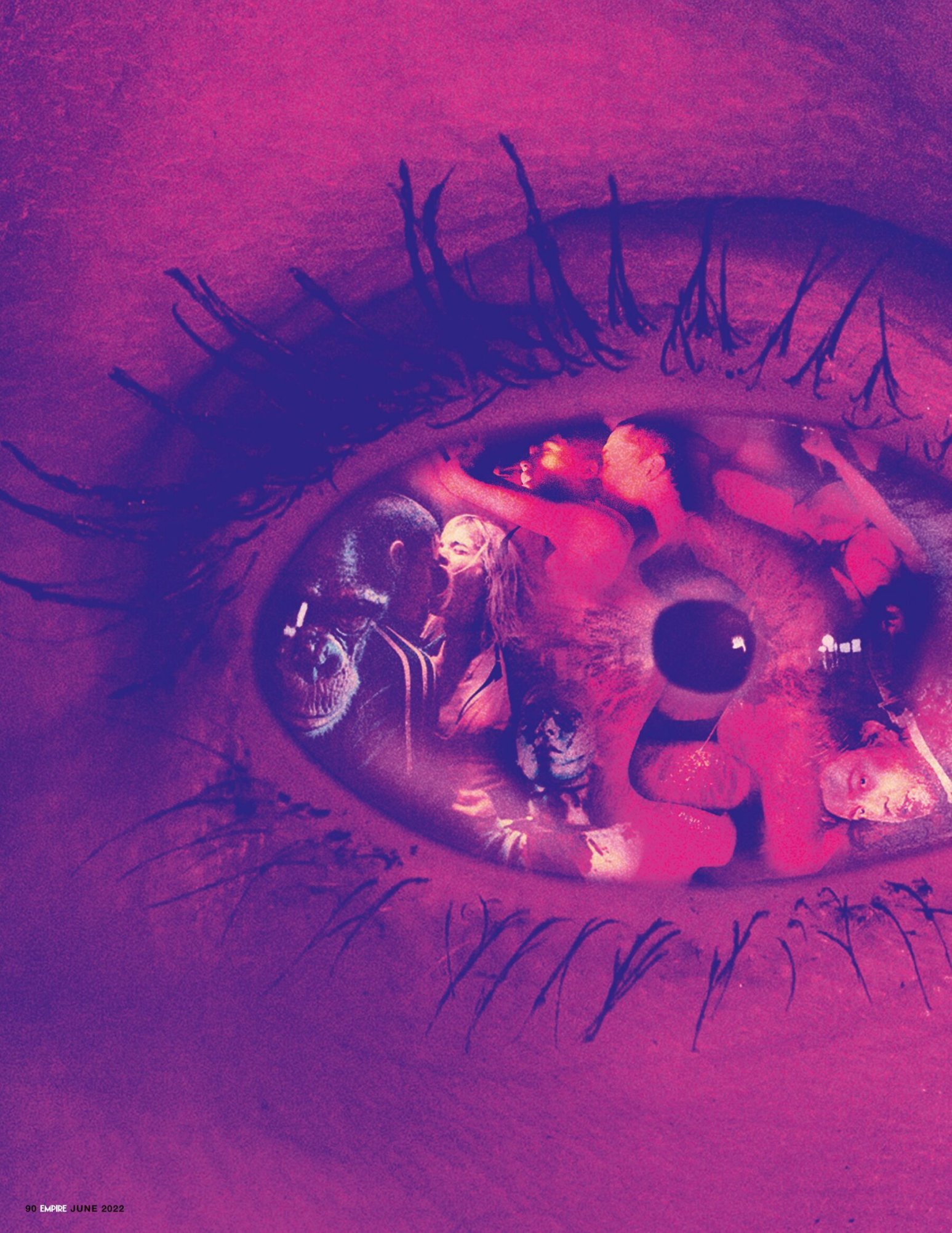
When *Empire* asks Cage if he considers himself an actor or a movie star first, he sighs deeply. Then, after a pause, he says, "Okay. I'm going to tell you something that I've not told other people." The answer takes him back to before he first adopted his stage name, to his cinematic debut, the 1982 comedy-drama *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*. "I was still Nicolas Coppola then, man," he says. "I'm not going to mention names, but I was bullied on that movie by other actors, because my name was Coppola. It was like, 'Oh, well, he thinks he can be an actor because he's Francis Ford Coppola's nephew.'"

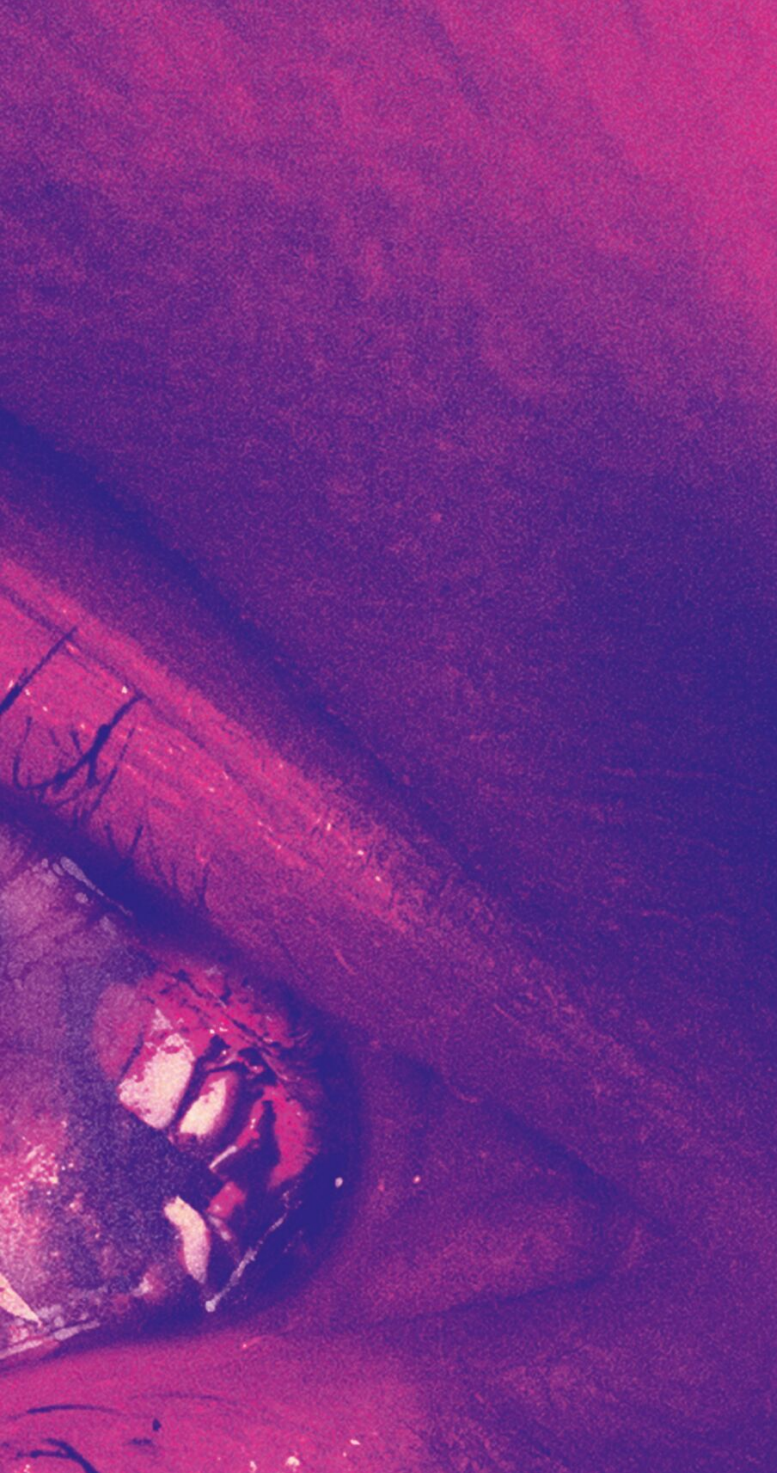
That torrid experience, he says, galvanised him into being a global icon, defined by an outlandish, unique approach to film performance, the Nicolas Cage we now know and love. "I thought, 'If I could be a movie star, who can generate billions of dollars, through true charisma that can translate worldwide... you can't do that simply because you're somebody's nephew.'"

So, 'Nicolas Cage' was born. But the truth is, he says, he's not that angry, sad, insecure kid on *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* anymore. "My true love in film is independently spirited dramas. I will always go back to that. But as a teenage actor, I was young and naive. I was thinking on a whole other level." Intriguingly, the younger version of himself in *Unbearable Weight* is listed in the credits as 'Nicky Kim Coppola'. In a delightfully Cage-ian slice of irony, his adopted stage surname has become his real identity; his birth name is now a mad, unhinged caricature.

He's like a snake eating its tail, or a movie star getting off with himself: always finding a rebirth, his cycle of creative life and death always ongoing. *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent* is just another stop on the cycle. As Pascal puts it, Cage is more than just an actor or a movie star: he contains multitudes. "He's like the perfect combination," Pascal says, eyes wide, "of artist, rock star, movie star, thespian, man, child... *god*." And above all else? He's Nic motherfucking Cage.

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT **IS IN CINEMAS FROM 22 APRIL**





EXCESS ALL AREAS

WORDS **STEVE ROSE**

ILLUSTRATION **MIKE CATHRO**

FOR YEARS THEY'VE BEEN SHOCKING CINEMA AUDIENCES, WITH FILMS THAT HAVE BROKEN THE MOULD AND BLOWN MINDS. AS THEY TEAM UP FOR *VORTEX*, WE MEET **DARIO ARGENTO** AND **GASPAR NOÉ** TO DISCUSS AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE – AND A HISTORY OF CONTROVERSY

DARIO ARGENTO AND GASPAR NOÉ HAVE SERVED UP SOME OF THE MOST EXTREME IMAGERY IN CINEMA.

Italy's Argento is one of the world's greatest horror directors, having revitalised the genre in the 1970s and '80s with a blend of vivid violence and amped-up atmospherics. Argentine provocateur Gaspar Noé, meanwhile, has his own proud record of subversive themes and sensory-onslaught visuals.

Argento has given us maggots raining down on ballerinas (*Suspiria*), a woman forced to witness her boyfriend's murder by needles taped under her eyelids (*Opera*), and Jennifer Connelly as an insect-controlling psychic saved by a cut-throat-razor-wielding chimpanzee (*Phenomena*). Noé's showreel of shock includes a horrifically violent revenge story told in reverse (*Irréversible*), a trippy Tokyo odyssey told from the point-of-view of a dead person (*Enter The Void*), and a dance movie that devolves into hallucinogen-fuelled madness (*Climax*).

For Noé's latest, *Vortex*, the pair have teamed up — although the film is a departure for both. Noé has coaxed the granddaddy of *giallo* in front of the camera, Argento embarking on an acting career at the ripe old age of 81, while Noé abandons cinematic excess in favour of documentary-like simplicity, the drama tracking the harrowing decline of an elderly Parisian couple. Argento plays a retired film critic; Françoise Lebrun (best known for the 1973 French classic *The Mother And The Whore*) plays his wife, a former psychiatrist with advanced dementia. Noé allows himself one cinematic flourish: he renders the couple's lives side by side via split-screen, which conveys both their intimacy and their separation, as they meander on different trajectories around their cluttered apartment.

In its own way, *Vortex* is as extreme as anything either filmmaker has ever done, in that it deals with the plain, everyday reality of its subject matter, unflinchingly, proving that neither Noé nor Argento have lost their edge. We sat down with them to discuss life, death, notoriety and movies. They did not hold back.

How did you two first meet?
Dario Argento: We met at the Toronto Film Festival. Gaspar had his first film, *Carne* [a ferocious 38-minute drama about a vengeful French butcher]. He asked me to see it with him. I went, we got to know each other, and we became friends.
Gaspar Noé: It was 1991. The person at the festival in charge of the cult, horror and fantasy films introduced us. I found a photo of us having dinner together that first day we met.

Were you a Dario fan, Gaspar?
Noé: Of course! Who wouldn't want to meet Dario Argento? Any young filmmaker who doesn't want to meet him needs to change their job. He's a legend!

Dario, what did you think of *Carne*?
Argento: It had an energy, a strength, something that really affected me. That's why I suggested producing his next film.
Noé: *Carne* is only 40 minutes long. I thought I would make a longer version, and Dario said, "If you want me to produce it, call me." It didn't happen because I made another film, *I Stand Alone*, but I found that really touching.
Argento: And then we met again when you were doing *Irréversible*. I came to the editing room. It was his first big, international film and I told him it was great. And then we met many times after that, and he became a great friend of my daughter, Asia Argento.
Noé: Asia helped me convince you to be in [*Vortex*], Dario. When I was writing it, my first thought was, "If only I could have someone as charismatic as Dario." Because Dario can present a film at the Cinémathèque and he'll talk on stage for an hour and people will applaud him like he's a great actor. And he always seems so comfortable in television interviews. I knew it wouldn't be a problem putting him in a fictional film. I said to Asia, "Do you think your father would possibly agree to act in a film?" She said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I'm not joking!" I was going to be shooting soon, and I knew his film [*Black Glasses*, which Argento recently directed] had been postponed because of Covid. She said, "My father wants to do the film but he has one or two conditions." I said, "That's great! I accept whatever conditions he has."
Argento: The most important condition, and the reason I did the film, was that it would be improvised. You had only written ten pages of ›







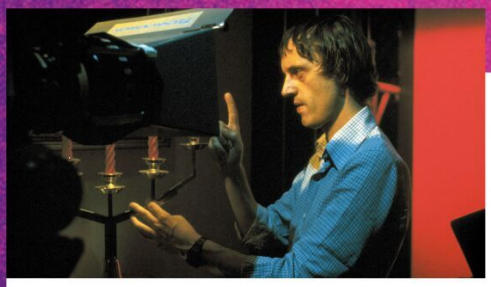








Clockwise from main: Gaspar Noé's psychedelic horror *Climax* (2018) — stay away from LSD, kids; Jessica Harper in Dario Argento's 1977 classic, *Suspiria*; Fiorenza Tessari in Argento's *Phenomena* (1985); Argento and Noé's new collaboration, *Vortex*.







Top: Dario Argento on set of his 1980 supernatural horror, *Inferno*. **Above:** Gaspar Noé enjoys a lighter moment while making the brutal *Irréversible* (2002).

script, and no dialogue. So every take, everything, we improvised. It was a great experience.
Noé: I didn't really direct him; he directed himself. I just had to keep him in a good mood. I told him, "I won't tell you what to do; you're the master. I'll take care of the camera, you take care of your character."

At one point in *Vortex*, Dario, your character has a heart attack. It almost looks like you're dying for real. How did you do it?
Argento: Gaspar had a double for me but I said, "No, I don't need that. I'll do it all myself, falling on the floor, everything." I'm a director. I know these things!
Noé: His lungs were making such a weird noise, like he was having an asthma attack. It sounded terrifying, like Darth Vader. When people saw the first cut of the movie, they said, "How did you do that sound effect?" But he did it himself. He made his lungs scream. I don't know how. Many people, especially women, have told me they cried during that scene.

You recently had a near-death experience yourself, Gaspar, didn't you?
Noé: I had a brain haemorrhage [in 2020]. I had to be rushed to hospital. They said I nearly died. In the end I came out unharmed, luckily, but the experience put my expectations that I would live a long time into perspective. It taught me a bit of humility. Then the next year Covid came, and I lost three close friends. After all this time with hospitals and death, the film came very naturally because it seemed so close to my life.
Argento: I didn't know he'd had a brain haemorrhage until after it had happened. Asia told me. When I spoke to Gaspar on the phone, he said he was all fine, so let's go. My warrior!
Noé: All my life I'd wanted to try morphine but never had the opportunity. Thanks to this brain haemorrhage I was on morphine for three weeks, so now I know! But more than that experience, the film has a lot to do with my mother, who had Alzheimer's and lost all reason in the last six months of her life — she was just like Françoise Lebrun in the film. It's not autobiographical, but I've always thought this type of experience, which affects all families, would be a good subject for a film. It's a universal situation but it's also taboo. It hurts people who have been through it so much, it's rarely represented in cinema. And around that time I saw Michael Haneke's *Amour*, which was showing at Cannes, and I cried a lot. My mother died a month later.
Argento: I also identified a lot with the character of the son in the film, because I was thinking of the love I had for my father, who I lost several years ago [producer Salvatore Argento, who died in 1987]. So I thought of this film as giving Gaspar a gift, something he could maybe remember his mother by. I pushed myself to do a good job and to be believable for my friend.
Noé: Thank you! What I loved about the performances of Dario and Françoise, and Alex Lutz, who plays the son — they were so natural, a lot of people said they didn't think they were watching a film with actors; they felt like they were watching a documentary and that everything was true.
Argento: I'll tell you something, Gaspar: I'm a son of neorealism. Neorealist cinema was my father and my grandfather. Neorealism took people off the streets and put them in front of the camera and just said, "Talk," in their own accents, and they said incredible things. It reminded me of that, so it was easier for me.
Noé: It's a great pleasure as a director to make people believe. Usually we're making people tremble with fear or giving them a heart attack. But with this we made people cry.

Yes, your films are very different to *Vortex* when it comes to depictions of death, aren't













Above: A feast for the eyes in Noé's 2009 trippy tour of life after death, *Enter The Void*. **Left:** Argento's 1975 murder thriller *Deep Red*.

Top to bottom: Harper's imperilled Suzy Bannion in *Suspiria*; Aomi Muyock and Karl Glusman in Noé's *Love* (2015); Heads roll in *Phenomena*; Noé's Charlotte Gainsbourg-starring *Lux Æterna* (2019).





Alamy, Allstar, Capital Pictures

they, Dario? People die in amazingly graphic ways in your movies.
Argento: I'm not Gaspar. I'm a different director with different ideas. Even though we're great friends, we have completely different styles.
Noé: Before I asked him to do the film, I went on IMDb to check if Dario had acted before. And all his credits as an actor are 'The Hands Of The Killer', 'The Hands Of The Ripper'.
Argento: Yes, it's true: I killed nearly everyone! It's my gloved hands that do all the grabbing, strangling, stabbing, stealing. Just my hands, but hands have an expressivity that's very important. Just like Alfred Hitchcock did a little cameo in each of his films, my cameo was to kill my victims.

Would it be safe to say that you find a lot of mainstream cinema a bit boring?
Argento: Yes, blockbusters are very boring... terrible. Films for little children! I don't understand why the cinemas are packed for blockbusters that are so incredibly stupid, with huge special effects, that make no sense. I don't really like American cinema. I love European cinema, I love Asian cinema: Korean, Japanese. Also Latin-American cinema: Argentinian, Brazilian, Mexican cinema is really interesting today. But American cinema is too artificial. Everyone is always drinking all the time. They come home, they have a whiskey, a beer. Always the same thing. Always the same stories: drug traffickers. There are some interesting American films, but not many.

It seems like your films in the 1970s spoke a different language to that, which maybe people weren't prepared for?
Noé: Your films invented, or reinvented, a genre. It was just beginning but you were the originator, the master. And a lot of what you did was borrowed later by the English and the Americans.
Argento: Yes, they took little bits, certain atmospheres, but I also loved Korean and Japanese cinema. They understood, especially with thrillers and horror films, that you also need psychology, which the Americans don't have — their films are always full of people who are a bit stupid. But the Koreans and the Japanese put the psychology of the characters on the surface. It's very important, a bit Freudian. You [Gaspar] gave me Freud's book, *The Interpretation Of Dreams*, the first day on set. I have it over there. You knew that was exactly what I needed.

Both of you have often been described as "extreme" filmmakers. Would you agree?
Noé: Extreme compared to your average movie, maybe, but compared to the cinema of Dario, or the cinema of Pasolini, of Fassbinder, of Buñuel, of John Boorman... It's a logical continuation for a cinephile who wanted to make films like the ones he loved. Films like mine or Dario's don't come out every week, in France, in Italy, or elsewhere, but there's a continuity. His films are like rollercoasters. I try to make films like that as well.

Dario, your serial-killer horror *Tenebrae* [1982] was one of the 'video nasties', banned in the UK. How did you feel about that?
Noé: That's a mark of quality. It's like winning a medal!
Argento: I was disgusted by that. But when I was in England maybe three years ago our screenings were completely sold out, and there were lots of people trying to get in. I have a lot of fans in England and Scotland, which makes me happy.
Noé: No-one's ever banned my films. There have been some countries where my films have never played. The major Muslim countries, for example, or China. *Vortex* is the first time one of my films will get a release in China. My films are too extreme for some countries but that's a badge of honour. A banned film is a film that people want to see.
Argento: My films have all come out in China and have been successful. When I went to Beijing, I went to a shop selling DVDs. It was huge: three floors. And at the front there was a chart of the bestselling DVDs in China, and third place was 'Dario Argento Collection #2'. That made me really happy. "#2" — I never found out what was in #1.

What did you think of Luca Guadagnino's recent remake of *Suspiria*?
Argento: I didn't like it. It was a completely different story. I thought, "Why use the name *Suspiria* if you're going to make a film that has nothing to do with *Suspiria*?" It didn't have the scariness, the elegance. I didn't like it and I still don't. I liked the music, though [by Radiohead's Thom Yorke]. That was very interesting.

You said before that you have very different styles. What do you think you have in common as filmmakers, though?
Noé: He's very playful in his provocation. And he's very, very visual in his thinking. Despite the fact that he started out as a screenwriter and a film critic, he doesn't come from a place of words; he comes from a place of images. His films are like paintings in motion. His principal organ of perception is the eye. It's the same for me. He loves vivid colours; I love vivid colours. He loves Cinemascope; I love Cinemascope. He loves "not suitable for children"; I love "not suitable for children".
Argento: In that sense there's very much a meeting of minds, an artistic union. The films we make are different, but deep down we're the same.

VORTEX IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 MAY

ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON, NOSFERATU'S FANGS ARE AS SHARP AS EVER. WE CELEBRATE THE BLOODSUCKING HORROR FILM THAT CAME FROM NOWHERE – AND CHANGED EVERYTHING

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

WORDS **PAMELA HUTCHINSON** ILLUSTRATION **PETER STRAIN**



"WANTED: 30-50 RATS."

This advert, placed in a local German newspaper in the summer of 1921, heralded the production of a film that continues to haunt our screens, and our imaginations. F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony Of Horror* was the first and is arguably still the best vampire movie. Its influence is so vast, it is almost impossible to measure. It is as timely now as when it was made, in the wake of another devastating pandemic.

"It's kind of the invention of the modern horror movie," Robert Eggers tells *Empire* — the director of *The Northman* and *The Lighthouse* has long cherished a plan for his own *Nosferatu* remake. "The thing that really makes it so memorable and important for everyone is Max Schreck," he says of the original. "His performance, and the make-up, which he did himself, is the blood of *Nosferatu*. It is completely magical."

Schreck was the enigmatic lead actor with the amazing prosthetics who played the vampire, Count Orlok. Little is known about the man, whose short career was primarily spent on stage; the biggest myth swirling around *Nosferatu* is that Schreck was a vampire himself. How else to explain his creepy appearance and unsettling name? Schreck is German for "terror".

The plot of *Nosferatu* may be familiar, given it began life as an uncredited, bootleg adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*. In fact, Stoker's widow Florence would later sue the filmmakers and demand that the film be destroyed. *Nosferatu* had been judged "too horrible" for distribution in Britain, but Florence ensured that the one copy that had been shown privately here was burned before anyone else could see it. For years, then, the movie, like its unearthly villain, was considered undead, existing only because a few rare copies escaped the axe. Yet by the 1960s there were enough prints in circulation for it to become an early cult film, and today it is widely available in a restoration that is as close as possible to the original. Even the original score, which was lost for years, has been found and re-recorded.

"When I first watched *Nosferatu*, it was a black-and-white VHS," says Eggers of discovering the film. "We didn't have the Blu-ray, the version that the Murnau estate has now restored in all its glory. But in some ways, that VHS version had even more atmosphere, because the print it was made from was such poor quality that you couldn't see the seams in Max Schreck's make-up. His eyes looked cat-like, and there was a kind of sfumato [a hazy blur] over the whole image. As a kid... I'd never seen anything like it." There is still nothing quite like it.

Robert Eggers is not wrong about Orlok: his grisly face and terrifying silhouette, as his shadow inches towards his victims, are unforgettable. He moves strangely, gliding across a ship's deck or rising uncannily from his bedtime coffin without a lurch, as if pivoting impossibly on his heels. When he pauses in a narrow doorway, the gothic arch frames him as tightly as that coffin. But he wasn't all Schreck's invention.

Orlok's true creator was Albin Grau, *Nosferatu*'s producer and art director. He had fought during World War I, and while on the Serbian front heard a story of how the spectre of a local farmer stalked a nearby village. When his coffin was cracked open, the body was intact, but his teeth had grown excessively long, protruding right out of his mouth. To save the man's soul, villagers plunged a wooden stake through his heart while saying prayers.

The image of this Serbian vampire preoccupied Grau, and in a 1921 essay he would describe the war, and the fear that it spread through Europe, as a "monstrous event that is unleashed across the earth like a cosmic vampire to drink the blood of millions and millions of men". When Grau started work on *Nosferatu* he drew a picture of a vampire with extended front teeth and beams of light shooting from his eyes; a hunched creature which looked more like a winged armadillo than a man.

Grau had a long-standing interest in the occult, but the myth of the vampire also represented a country battle-scarred and economically weakened by losing the war, in mourning for its fallen soldiers, and reeling from the 1918-1920 flu pandemic. Many people in Germany, including Grau, turned to the supernatural for answers. You can see that influence in many of the great German films of the period, such as *The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari* (1920), with its sleepwalking murderer, *Der Golem* (1920), which was inspired by a Jewish folk legend, and of course *Nosferatu*.

Grau's chosen director, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, also had an interest in the occult, and had also fought in the war. He saw heavy action as a fighter pilot, surviving eight serious crashes, and his close friend, the writer Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele (also believed to be his lover), died in action in 1915. Demobbed in 1919, Murnau moved





Clockwise from here: Max Schreck's Count Orlok, getting too ancient for this shit; Cinema's most iconic shadow; Orlok forgets to apply his Factor 50; The Count awakens.







into the film industry and worked intensely, directing nine features in three years, before Grau approached him for *Nosferatu*.

Filming began in July 1921, with a budget so tight they could afford only a single camera. The German scenes were shot mostly in the port city of Wismar, and the Transylvanian sequences were filmed in northern Slovakia; Orlok's home, Orava Castle, is open to the public should you care to visit. Murnau's direction departs from the theatrical Expressionist style of the time to tease the terror out of its mostly rural locations, creating frames that mimic classic German Romantic art.

"People think of *Nosferatu* as a German Expressionist film," says Eggers, "but they were trying to do a more photo-realistic version of Biedermeier Germany and the Romantic tradition. You can see that the costumes, the props and the set-dressing endeavoured to be very period-correct for 1838."

For the supernatural aspects, Murnau deployed simple effects such as fast motion (undercranking the camera) and negative film ›



to conjure the uncanny — camera tricks that triumph because of their simplicity. Light is everything in this movie and *Nosferatu*'s greatest gift to vampire lore is the ubiquitous trope of demise by sunlight. "The death of Dracula in the book is actually quite boring," says Dr Cristina Massaccesi, associate professor at University College London, and author of the book *Nosferatu: A Symphony Of Horror*. "He's stabbed and it's just like a normal villain being dispatched. But the film has this incredible supernatural element to the vampire being killed by sunlight, because he really is a creature of the night."

That is not the film's only deviation from *Dracula*. Grau's screenwriter Henrik Galeen changed the names (Dracula becomes Orlok), and altered the setting, from late Victorian Whitby to 1838 (the year of a plague outbreak in Bremen) and the fictional city of Wisborg. There, a man named Hutter (Gustav von Wangenheim), working for a sinister estate agent called Knock (Alexander Granach), is sent to Transylvania to meet Orlok, who wants to buy a house in Wisborg. Hutter wakes up in Orlok's castle the next morning with puncture wounds in his neck. And then, *Nosferatu* really comes into its own.

The screenplay reads like a spooky poem: "Yet in the sand... something moves violently... something is alive... jumps out... horrible animals... rats!!" Those rats emerge from coffins transported by Orlok from Transylvania to Wisborg, coffins that are, according to one of the film's captions, "filled with accursed earth from the field of Black Death." These rats spread disease just as Orlok, "the bird of death", kills his victims — by biting. Although Orlok cannot create new vampires, a miasma of death surrounds him that's as contagious as a pandemic. The crew on Orlok's ship die off one by one. By the time Orlok disembarks from a ghost ship, carrying his own coffin as he wanders the deserted streets, the city of Wisborg is fully stricken by plague and panic. Crosses are chalked on doors, and townsfolk chase the deranged Knock, clearly under Orlok's thrall, out of town.

"Orlok is the Patient Zero of vampires," says Anna Bogutskaya, writer, broadcaster and host of the *Final Girls* horror podcast. "He is a source of a plague that is unstoppable." Orlok is a beast who cannot pass for human. He has long, pointed ears covered in tufts of hair; sharp, blade-like teeth that force his mouth permanently open; and a hunched back. His long, talon-like nails grow longer and more gnarled over the course of the film — just like the Serbian vampire in his coffin.

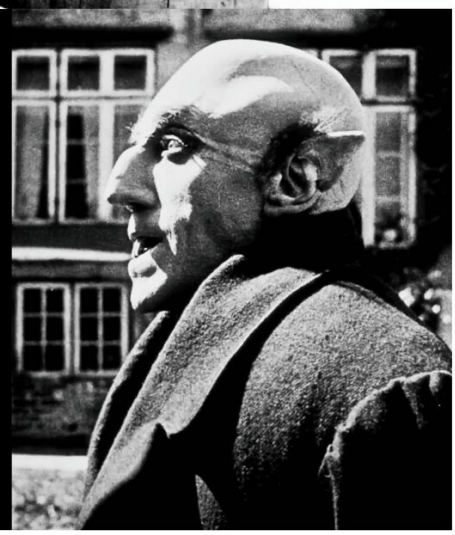
Bogutskaya compares Orlok to a cockroach scuttling into the bedroom of Hutter's wife, Ellen (Greta Schröder); Grau said the inspiration for Orlok's appearance came from watching a spider feed on its prey. For Professor Stacey Abbott of the University of Roehampton, and the author of the book *Celluloid Vampires*, Orlok's grim appearance is another important part of the film's influence. "We keep coming back to those moments where the vampire is really monstrous, and it kind of spills out of them," she says. "There's a great line in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* where they refer to the Master, who I would say is in a direct line from Orlok. They say he has moved beyond the need to look human, and he is just pure vampire."

Orlok represents the elusive terror of diseased breath. He can pass through walls, and lives in the dark. The danger is airborne. "It feels incredibly relevant," says Abbott. "The film came out in the wake of the Spanish flu epidemic, so it has these very overt connections

Alamy, Getty Images, Landmark, Shutterstock









Clockwise from left: Hutter (Gustav von Wangenheim) receives a night-time visit; Orlok stalks the ship; Schreck proves he *can* survive sunlight; Klaus Kinski's take on the Count; Willem Dafoe Maxes out in 2000's *Shadow Of The Vampire*.

to pestilence and disease and plague." The word "nosferatu" itself appeared in Bram Stoker's novel. It is thought to be an old Romanian or Slavic word for "vampire" or "undead", but its root may well be the Greek "nosphorus", meaning "plague-carrier". There are connections to plagues in ancient vampire folklore — the undead carry disease when they rise from their graves.

The most famous and influential shots in the film are of Orlok's warped shadow gliding up the staircase towards Ellen's bedroom and falling across her body in bed. You can't resist the power of this darkness, a danger you might have accidentally invited into your home — like a vampire or a disease.

And so this ghoulish film has spread a widening influence across cinema. Orlok isn't just a figure of horror, but also of terrible sadness. He is shown framed in the window of his new Wisborg home gazing listlessly across the street to Ellen's house. His eyes are doleful, and he has to turn away because the pain of longing is unbearable.

"What I really enjoyed about *Nosferatu* was the loneliness of the character," says Claes Bang, who played the title character in the BBC's 2020 take on *Dracula*. "You've been alive for 200 years now, you haven't spoken to anybody in 50, it's a Tuesday afternoon in November, it's about to get dark and you're just about to get out of your coffin — but why bother? There's no-one there, and there's no-one to feed on... I'm making a bit of a joke out of it, but living forever and having nothing to do and no-one to share it with must be so weird. That loneliness and weirdness came out really well in *Nosferatu*."

Perhaps this is why the film has aged so well: our hearts still break a little at this image of a monster driven mad by immortality.

Werner Herzog certainly channelled the world-weary sorrow of eternal life when he remade the film as *Nosferatu The Vampyre* in 1979, with Klaus Kinski as the isolated Count. Herzog's Dracula (the name was changed back again) is a more sympathetic figure, and his production was more ambitious — for one scene in the film he insisted on releasing not 30 or 50 rats, but 11,000.

One of the most interesting riffs on *Nosferatu* is E. Elias Merhige's 2000 film *Shadow Of The Vampire*, which runs with the idea that Max Schreck really was a bloodsucker. Willem Dafoe stars as an ageing, embittered Schreck, coaxed into performing for the camera. It's a chilling film, which channels the eerie experience of watching *Nosferatu* into a gruesome creation myth. And it was made with reverence.

"To play Max Schreck, I had this beautiful model of him in *Nosferatu*," Dafoe tells *Empire* of his preparation. "I watched it a lot. It's animalistic, and planted a seed for a whole vampire mythology. Visually, it's very striking and plays on your imagination. Murnau was an incredible filmmaker. That was my guide, my place to start. The truth is, you can never really copy."

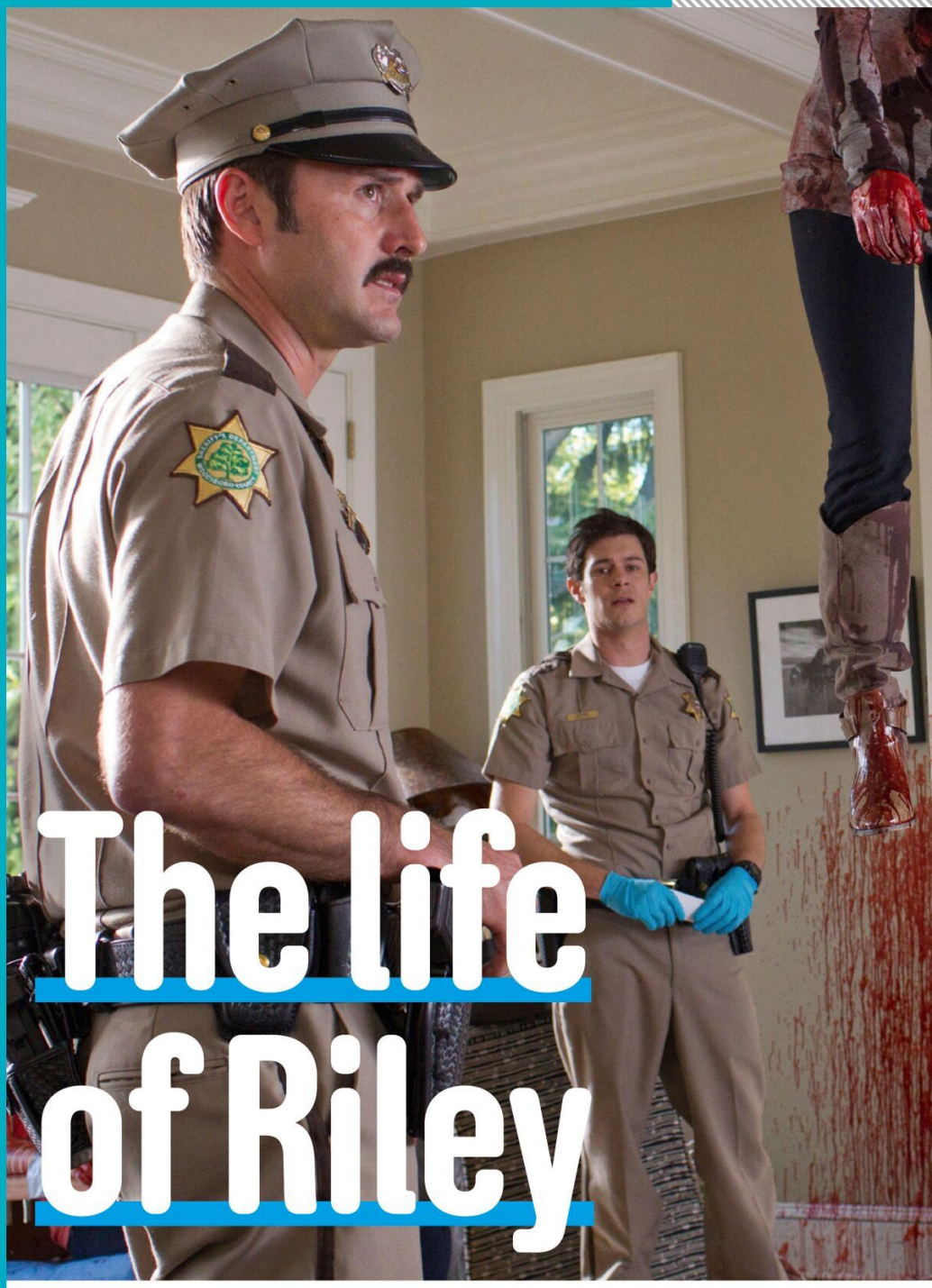
The legacy continues to spread. "We're still seeing *Nosferatu* in every single vampire movie that's been made since 1999," says Bogutskaya. It's hard to think of a vampire who isn't destroyed by rays of sunlight, or whose shadow doesn't fall across his victim before he bites. Eggers compares the cross-editing in the climax of *Nosferatu* to that in the films of Francis Ford Coppola — especially, of course, his lurid *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

"There is a bit of *Nosferatu* in a lot of vampire films," agrees Massaccesi. And in television too: there are traces of Orlok in the Stephen King adaptation *Salem's Lot*, while *American Horror Story: Hotel* explores the idea that Schreck infected Murnau with vampirism. He then, the show posits, bit Rudolph Valentino when he came to Hollywood, the plague carrying to Tinseltown just as the influence of *Nosferatu* spread to American cinema.

Having embodied the mysterious figure at the heart of the film, Dafoe nails the reasons why *Nosferatu* endures. "So much of that has to do with the thing about the undead, and desire, sexuality, sleep... There are so many things floating around in there. Essential themes about the stories we tell. And the historical context makes it romantic and mysterious and plays on our imagination."

A century after it was first released, *Nosferatu* continues to evoke our deepest fears, as proven by how often we catch glimpses of it in our favourite horror movies. It represents an infection in the very blood of cinema, one that cannot be contained. Not until the lights come up in the cinema, the rats scurry away and the vampire is banished once more — but never for good.

SPOILER WARNING



The life of Riley

DAVID ARQUETTE has played lovable cop Dwight 'Dewey' Riley in every *Scream* movie. As the latest instalment hits home, he tells *Empire* about his journey

CAUTION: DO NOT READ IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN *SCREAM* (2022)

TO QUOTE THE name of a recent documentary, you cannot kill David Arquette. But you can, sadly, kill Dewey Riley, the loveable, bumbling, pure-hearted police officer whom Arquette has portrayed, winningly, across 25 years and all five films in the *Scream* franchise, from *Scream* to, erm, *Scream*. Arquette had developed the moustachioed mope, who was a minor character earmarked for death first time out, into one of the series' three ever-present pillars, along with Neve Campbell's Sidney Prescott and Courteney Cox's Gale Weathers. The latter, in particular, formed half of a sweet and often surprising on-off relationship with Dewey which echoed the real-life marriage and divorce



of Arquette and Cox.

Across the four previous films, all directed by Wes Craven, Dewey had been stabbed, knocked unconscious, stabbed again, beaten around the head with a bedpan ("That was degrading," laughs Arquette), and stabbed once more for good measure by the various psychos assuming the mantle of the masked killer Ghostface. Yet he had always come through. Until the confusingly named *Scream*, that is, when directors Matt Bennett-Olpin and Tyler Gillett bumped Dewey off halfway through, Ghostface gutting him like a fish. Just to leave no room for doubt.

Many characters in the franchise have met their makers, but this one hurt. And, when *Empire* caught up on Zoom with the funny (if occasionally fuzzy-on-the-details) Arquette, it's clear that he's not quite over it either.

How much have you talked about Dewey's demise?
I haven't talked about it much. It's a very fresh wound.

When did you know it was going to happen? Did the directors, Matt and Tyler, warn you in advance?
When I read it. They had not given me a heads-up, so I was like [*mimes thumbing through the script*], "Wow, Dewey's got some good stuff to play this time!" And then, "Oh, that's why!" I had to put it down, I had to walk around and kind of process it. I understood where they were coming from, as far as gutting their audience. It was hard. It's been such an ongoing film series throughout my life, 25 years of my life, so it definitely cut deep.

Were you ever of a mind to say, "I live or I don't do the movie"?
I don't know. I had this sort of experience in the wrestling world where you're allowed to say, "I won't do that." But I'm an actor for hire. That's the film they want to make. I could say, "No, I'm not going to be in it," I guess. But I need to work. And I did understand where they were coming from. I couldn't suggest taking someone else out!

What are your memories of filming Dewey's death?
Oh man, it was kind of a trip. I was staying at the hotel with all the younger actors, in Covid quarantine. The place we were staying had a little kitchenette, so I'd cook for myself. I was living a little bit like Dewey did. And that morning, I got up, cooked myself some breakfast, and then I went to work and did the scene. I didn't know exactly what was going to happen. We amped up the fight scene a little because I'm a professional wrestler. We made it a little more intense. If you have a lot of action, you're going to get banged up a little, and if you have blood ›



Above: A sticky situation in *Scream 4* (2011). **Here:** "Is that Ghostfacebusters?" Under threat again in the latest instalment.

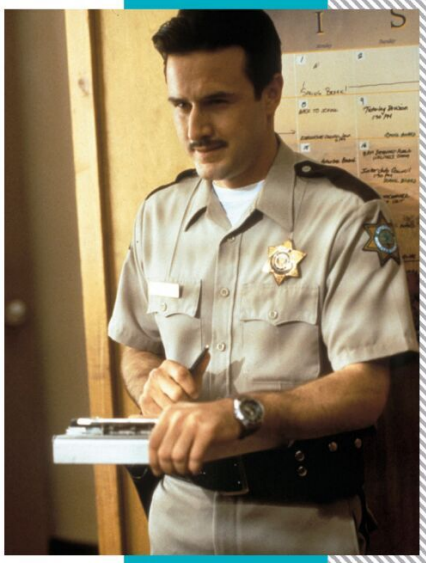
on you, the longer it goes it's just kind of sticky and uncomfortable. So you've got to get into a Zen place, so you're not angry. And I was angry anyway. So I just had to get into a real Zen place, just breathe through and know that this will be over soon. But it was emotional. I did it, and I hopped in my car, drove home, washed all the blood off, and that was it. I packed up a few things and then hit the road.

Dewey's arc is really emotional. The relationship with Gale through all five films is lovely, and that last scene you have with Courteney must have been really memorable.
It was. I mean, we co-parent, so we're still active as far as that goes in each other's lives. We had shared history. When you know someone for that long, losing parents and whatnot, that adds this intensity to the history. It definitely makes it easier to draw on emotion.

The contrast between this Dewey and the Dewey in the original *Scream* is marked. He was almost the comic relief in the first movie. Did you look at him that way?
Yeah. The idea of an authority figure that gets no respect was really funny to me. There's a lot of places for comedy with a guy who's trying to prove himself and can never quite get it right. People underestimated him. And, apparently, they were right. Ultimately. But I always thought of Clint Eastwood, and the iconic male figures in the world, and his goal was to be a tough guy, but he just never was. That's not really who he is. He's more of a sweetheart.

Your first scene in *Scream* is in the principal's office with Henry Winkler.
I love that scene. That was so fun. I'd grown up down the street from Paramount Studios and it had always been a dream of mine to work on a Paramount film. I would walk by myself to Paramount and watch *Laverne & Shirley*, *Happy Days*, *Mork & Mindy*, and all these shows get filmed in front of a live studio audience. I loved it. And one time after *Happy Days*, I waited and Henry Winkler came out. He was the only cast member that did. I was a huge Fonzie fan. He shook my hand. I told him that story on set and he went, "Let me shake your hand again." So that was my first day of shooting. They gave me a clipboard, and it was super-official. I had my badge and uniform on, and then [Rose McGowan's] character just starts cutting me down.

Top to bottom: The moustache makes its debut in *Scream* (1996); With Courteney Cox — as Gale Weathers — in 2000's *Scream 3*; Tense times for the pair in *Scream 2* (1997).









Was the 'tache in the script? Or was that a David Arquette addition?
I definitely wanted the moustache. That was big. The progression of the moustache is a big part. You know, *Scream 3* has its issues, but I trimmed it myself and it got all wonky. It added to the whole craziness of *Scream 3*. In *Scream* [2022] it's a real man's moustache. At least he finally got the moustache right. Although he should have shaved his neckbeard, which I was made aware of.

Did you get a sense that Dewey was living on borrowed time sometimes? He was meant to die at the end of *Scream* and *Scream 2*, I believe.
I think he did [originally], in both of them, and Wes brought me back, I'm pretty sure. He has this injury, and it was interesting because you never see the repercussions of being stabbed in any of these films. I thought it would be interesting to see the effect of violence on a character. But then it was too much. They wanted to get rid of it. By *Scream 4* they were like, "Lose the limp!"





Top to bottom: A Ghostface costume is discovered in *Scream 4* (2011); An older, wiser, sadder Dewey in 2022's *Scream*; The man behind the mask: Arquette and Dewey take a bow.

Alamy, Landmark

Is *Scream 2* a film that holds fond memories for you? Dewey gets his own theme, and becomes this off-kilter romantic lead.
Scream '1' and *2* had the most solid scripts. But *Scream 2* was really hard for me. I did get to work with my father [actor Lewis Arquette], which was really wonderful. But my mother was dying at that point and that was really painful and hard. I was in a really tough space. We had to reshoot the scene where I say, "Have you ever considered my lack of experience to be merely a facade?" Wow, I can't believe I remembered any of that. But that whole thing, I had botched. Thankfully, Wes allowed me to do it again.

And *Scream 3* had its fair share of hijinks on and off set. What's your take on it?
I recently rewatched parts of it. And I read Wes Craven's biography, so I got a better understanding of where he was coming from. It was fun to do, because it was more humour-based, and when you tend to work on comedies, if you're working with the right people, it's a lot of fun.

Dewey gets to kill the bad guy in that movie. Was that something that—
[*Laughs*] Until you told me that, I don't remember killing the bad guy in that one!

Trust me, Dewey kills the bad guy.
Who was it? Was it Scott Foley?

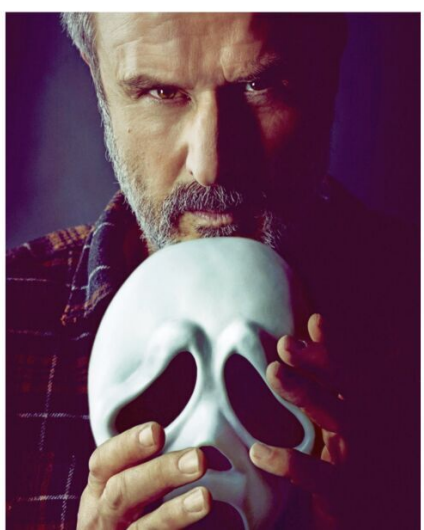
It was Scott Foley.
Well, he deserved it! No, he's an amazing guy.

***Scream 4* was the first legacy sequel. It was the first time you, Neve Campbell and Courteney had all returned together. Did you approach Dewey in a different way now that he was older?**
It's so weird. A lot of these films crossed personal milestones too. There are all these kind of things going on. It was a bit of a mess. Some things in the story weren't working, so things were changing a lot. It was a weird time. Again, I was going through stuff in my personal life, and I guess Dewey and Gale's relationship was strange. It did parallel personal stuff.

But that imbued everything those characters did with a sense of emotional weight.
It's just so strange. I guess that's what happens in life.



That Dewey-Gale relationship is so interesting. It went in an unexpected direction. It's a little bit Clark Kent and Lois Lane, but it's so sweet, especially in *Scream 2*. Is that something that just happened organically?
I guess it happened organically. I like that. I'm Superman! But Courteney always had the most fun when she could play Gale as tough and kind of crass. But in retrospect, there was a lot of Wes there. Some of his humour and sweetness was attached to Dewey. I think losing Wes affected us all in a really heavy way. He was a little bit of an angel to me, as far as keeping my character alive. And Matt and Tyler are not! They're Ghostfaces!



They say it was nothing to do with them, and the writers had put it in the script when they came on board.
Then I take it back! Jamie and Guy, you're Ghostfaces!

So you're not coming back for *Scream 6*?
Dewey's gone. I mean, you never know. There's the multiverse, but I don't think Dewey would appear in a multiverse! **CHRIS HEWITT**

SCREAM IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL





Animators Frank Thomas and Milt Kahl truly made a meal of this beloved scene.

Allstar

THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic images came to life

Lady And The Tramp

IF YOU WANT the true definition of Disney magic, look no further than the spaghetti-slurping date at the heart of *Lady And The Tramp*. Frankly, the idea is inherently unpleasant — two dogs chowing down on a plate of pasta, tomato sauce sloshing around, all ending in a smooch between a cocker spaniel and a street mutt. Instead, legendary animators Frank Thomas and Milt Kahl (two of Disney's fabled Nine Old Men) served up one of the most swoonsome shots in movie history.

Arriving just over halfway into the film, it marks the turning point in Lady (Barbara Luddy) and Tramp's (Larry Roberts) courtship — having already protected the well-to-do Lady from menacing strays and helped her remove her muzzle, Tramp pulls out the ultimate romantic ace card: taking her to (the back alley behind) Tony's Restaurant, where the eccentric Italian owner serves the pair "the best-a spaghetti in town". Who wouldn't be swept up by such a lovely *bella notte*?

But where Thomas and Kahl saw a recipe for romance, Walt Disney didn't. Upon seeing the storyboards, the studio figurehead was unconvinced, thinking the notion of dogs having dinner would result in... well, a dog's dinner of a scene. With the vision for what might be, though, Thomas went off and pencilled the entire sequence himself — every head-tilt, every chewing motion, and the pair's eventual meet-in-the-middle kiss — to show Walt as a proof of concept. Once he did, it was love at second sight.

It's the character animation — aka the acting — that really sells the sequence; each pup trying to play it cool, while their faces display the abundant joy of this shared experience. They might be dogs, but Lady's blush after her mouth meets Tramp's is a none-more-human moment. It's easy to believe that two dogs can fall head-over-paws for each other.

The finished sequence proved such a hit during production that additional frames were created to slow the scene down, all the better to revel in the sheer beauty of the moment and allow the rhythm of the romance to flow just right.

Furthermore, the ultra-wide frame (*Lady And The Tramp* marked Disney Animation's first foray into CinemaScope) offered all the space needed to capture the canines' growing bond. For much of the film, the aspect ratio delivers a broad, dog's-eye-view of the world. Here, it frames the two characters perfectly as they're drawn together into the centre of the frame by that single spaghetti strand. The results are a doggone delight.

BEN TRAVIS

LADY AND THE TRAMP IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DISNEY+

INSTANT TRIVIA

1

The scene has been parodied many times, notably in *Hot Shots!*, with Charlie Sheen and Valeria Golino taking the place of Tramp and Lady.

2

Disney was partly inspired by a short story he'd read, titled 'Happy Dan, The Cynical Dog'.

3

The novelisation was released two years before the film itself, so audiences would become attached to the story.

4

After its 1955 debut, the film was re-released in 1962, 1971, 1980 and 1986.







! SPOILER WARNING

THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the must-see moments from the month's big release



Spider-Man: No Way Home

CHRIS MCKENNA AND Erik Sommers have been the principal writing team behind all three of Marvel Studios' Spider-Man films. But with *No Way Home*, they faced a particularly onerous and nearly impossible task: bring the story of Tom Holland's Peter Parker to a satisfying close, while also incorporating key characters from the previous 20 years of Spider-Man movies, including a bunch of familiar villains and more Peter Parkers than you could spin a web at.

IDENTITY CRISIS

One of *No Way Home*'s first surprises is that the issue created by the end of the last film, *Far From Home*, in which Mysterio took his revenge from beyond the grave by revealing Spider-Man's secret identity to the world, is dealt with in the breakneck opening section. "We had versions where the whole story was about Peter trying to clear his name," says Sommers. "Then we realised that the aftermath should trigger something, which would then be the plot of the movie."

MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS

"We were already circling the idea of *It's A Wonderful Life*, where a wish is made to undo the life that Peter has made for himself," says McKenna. That made Benedict Cumberbatch's Doctor Strange the prime candidate for Special Guest Star, but also opened the door to exploring the Multiverse. All kinds of options were discussed, including a brief post-credits sting where villains from the previous non-MCU Spider-movies showed up, as a tease for a future instalment. "Then one day Kevin Feige said, 'What if that's the story we tell?' And that was the breakthrough."

THE SINISTER FIVE

Spidey faces off against Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin, Alfred Molina's Doctor Octopus, Jamie Foxx's Electro, Rhys Ifans' Lizard, and Thomas Haden Church's Sandman, a quintet of villains all plucked from the movies directed by Sam Raimi and Marc Webb. Again, Sommers and McKenna had numerous options on the table at one point, including an appearance by Tom Hardy's Venom that would have been very different from the bewildered cameo he contributes in the film's post-credit sting. "So Eddie Brock makes it to the MCU but he never makes it out of a bar," laughs McKenna. "But there were versions where he shows up earlier. We were going to try to have him show up at the Statue Of Liberty [for the final fight], and we were even toying with having him stuck in the Lincoln Tunnel."

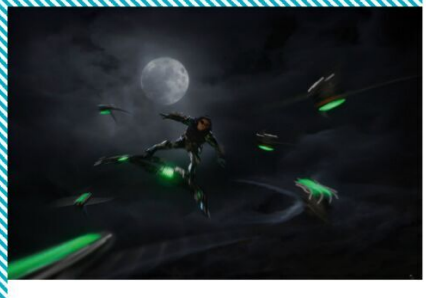
MAY DAY

The film's darkest point, and perhaps wildest swing (which is saying something, considering where it goes), is the shocking death of Marisa Tomei's Aunt May, at the hands (and glider) of the Green Goblin. There had always been a presumption that Holland's Peter had











experienced the famous death of Uncle Ben off-screen, but McKenna and Sommers felt that it was time for him to experience real loss on screen, mere seconds after May says the famous line, "With great power comes great responsibility." "Peter has been raised and trained and given this moral compass by May," says McKenna. "But he's never actually gone through what the two previous cinematic Peter Parkers have. Aunt May is basically this universe's version of Uncle Ben, who dies in order to protect that ideal and give it to Peter."

THE TWO PETERS

After that comes the big, crowd-pleasing revelation: it isn't just villains who have arrived in this world thanks to Strange's spell. Along come two other Peter Parkers — first, Andrew Garfield's, then Tobey Maguire's — in a comedic scene featuring Peter's girlfriend MJ (Zendaya) and best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon). "The big challenge was, 'Are they going to show up to get cheap applause, or can we have them come in a way that is not only meaningful to our Peter, but to themselves?'" asks Sommers. At one point, the two Peters were brought to Holland's mourning Spider-Man by Doctor Strange, before the idea of introducing them at Ned's grandmother's house came along. "If they had shown up on the rooftop where Peter is devastated, it would have been exciting to see these guys, but it would have been so heavy," Sommers adds. "Navigating that tonal shift was tricky, and it helped so much because Peter wasn't there. Instead, it's Ned and MJ, and that totally liberated us."

REDEMPTION

Garfield, in particular, attacks being Peter Parker again with a wonderfully off-kilter relish, making up for lost time after his two not particularly well-received *Amazing Spider-Man* movies. His path to rehabilitation reaches its apex in a moment where his Peter saves MJ from a fatal fall; a pointed riff on the end of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, in which his girlfriend Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone) died in similar circumstances. The duo cheerfully admit that it wasn't their idea; instead, it was something an enterprising concept artist presented to the team. "I remember Jon [Watts, director]talking about how, if Andrew catches her, that could be his redemption for what happened," says Sommers. "That fits perfectly."

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

The film ends with Peter finally buying into the "great responsibility" part of that maxim, and deciding to sacrifice himself after a fashion, asking Strange to recast the spell; only this time, everyone will forget who Peter Parker is. Including Strange, Ned, and MJ. It was an idea that Watts had floated as a plot point early on, but as the film progressed, it became the ending, with Peter alone, cut off from his friends, none of whom remember him. Bleak. "That's Peter Parker," says McKenna. "He knows it's the right thing. He's made the sacrifice and he's okay with it." Not to mention, it's one heck of a starting point for the next Spider-Man film, whenever that may be... **CHRIS HEWITT**

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY, 4K AND DIGITAL



THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers. Nine movies. Ordered definitively.

Spider-Man movies

Chris: We've had nine standalone *Spider-Man* movies since 2002. Why does Hollywood keep going back to the spider?

Ben: One of my favourite things about Spider-Man is that he's a teenager. It's a lovely combination to have that character being torn between normal kids' stuff, while also dealing with the responsibility of saving an entire city.

Helen: Kids can latch onto teenage heroes in a way that they can't always latch onto adult heroes.

Amon: The drive to do the right thing in spite of everything else you have to deal with is the core of Spider-Man. The best films have done a very good job of showing that in a very cool way.

Chris: Plus, swinging around the city is inherently cinematic. It just looks cool. So, the films, then. Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, in 2002. Does this hold up?

Ben: It doesn't shy away from the comic-book ethos. The Green Goblin costume is an element of that.

Chris: That's one of the most unfortunate things about that movie. But Raimi brings a real sense of sincerity. "With great power comes great responsibility" is not just a slogan for him.

Helen: He took the comics very seriously. He took them as a bible, and showed you could make a massively successful film from that.

Amon: As goofy as the first one is, it's not afraid to go to dark places. The final fight with the Goblin is very, very intense.

Chris: I think Raimi was holding himself back a little bit. The showman Raimi is there, but not as pronounced as in *Spider-Man 2*. That movie was unfettered Raimi.

Amon: Everything got an upgrade, from the score to the action to the villain. I love Willem Dafoe as the Green Goblin, but Alfred Molina as Doc Ock is so good.

Helen: He's the most interesting Spider-Man villain. Molina did a magnificent job of giving him a lot of heart. Do I love the fridging of his wife? No, of course not.

Chris: She did gain the proportional speed and strength of a fridge.

Helen: Plus, you've got that amazing operating-room sequence with Raimi just going off the charts.

Chris: So what went wrong with *Spider-Man 3*?

OUR CRITICS



CHRIS HEWITT
Can do approximately 1.67 per cent of what a spider can.



HELEN O'HARA
Also once lost her Uncle Ben. But she bought some more rice the next day.



BEN TRAVIS
His favourite Spidey is Tom Holland. But what about Nicholas Hammond?!



AMON WARMANN
Has never been bitten by a radioactive spider. Not for the lack of trying.



Illustration: Jacey

Helen: Raimi was interested in telling the Harry Osborn story he'd been building to for three films, and the Sandman story. And then you had the studio going, "All the kids love Venom, put Venom in your movie." It just makes a fucking mess.
Chris: However, it has some great stuff in it. When Peter turns into a raging dickhead for 20 minutes, that's fun.
Ben: The Venom story infects everything else around it.
Chris: They rebooted the main character just five years later with *The Amazing Spider-Man*. I struggle with those two movies. The thing they get most right is Andrew Garfield, and Emma Stone. Everything else is misconceived.
Helen: Emma Stone is the most comics-faithful MJ ever, and they called her Gwen Stacy. When they did that, they wrote the end of the second film and wrote themselves into a corner. I'm still furious about that.
Ben: I slightly prefer *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. It has so many problems and so many villains and does the bad thing at the end, but it's a little bit more colourful and splashy. *The Amazing Spider-Man* feels very post-Nolan: "We have to do a gritty reboot."
Chris: Those movies feel focus-grouped to death.
Helen: I think Sony understood something had gone very wrong. There was a sense they needed to change.
Chris: And Spider-Man entered the MCU. And we get Tom Holland.
Ben: He's perfect. *Homecoming* is so funny. I think it might be the best American teen movie, post-*Mean Girls*. It has loveable characters, and school cliques and bullies, and he fancies the girl...
Chris: Who just happens to be the daughter of the supervillain trying to kill him.
Amon: At the screening, people broke out into applause for a good 20 seconds when that twist was revealed.
Chris: It gives you the reason why Michael Keaton plays the Vulture. Until then it's been Generic Villainville.
Amon: I like that Peter was a young Spider-Man who has not yet assumed his final form.
Chris: Like the Tooth Fairy from *Red Dragon*.
Amon: And because of that we get scenes where he's doing stuff for the first time, and he's fearful.
Chris: We were also sceptical about the next Spider-Man movie. When *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse* was announced, I was like, "Really? An animated movie?"
Amon: I think it's the best superhero film of 2018.
Chris: It's the best superhero film of 2018 that's not called *Avengers: Infinity War*.
Amon: It's a masterpiece.
Ben: It's a perfect marriage of form and function. The way they use the language of animation to get across a sense that Miles Morales is less confident, by being literally a different frame-rate to Peter Parker, who is smooth and who glides, is an incredible thing. It's the most groundbreaking animated film since *Toy Story*.
Helen: Pixar always say, "What is the reason this has to be animated?" This film has all of the answers. There is no way to make this film that isn't animation.
Chris: They could never make a live-action film with multiple Spider-Men.
Amon: I would also argue that the leap of faith Miles takes is the best Spider-Man moment on screen. Period.
Chris: After that we were back to live action with *Far From Home*. I think I prefer this to *Homecoming*.
Ben: I'm just going to sit here in stunned silence.
Helen: It's a testament to the high standards of the Tom Holland films that *Far From Home* is by far the weakest, and it's still fucking great.
Chris: And then after that came *No Way Home*.
Helen: This could have been an absolute frickin' nightmare. I think they did a beautiful job, first of bringing in the bad guys, then the other Spider-Men, and making those characters work together.
Chris: I've never come out of a film buzzing the way I came out of *No Way Home*. Yes, the film is flawed — visually, it doesn't have a lot of finesse — but I've never experienced anything like that before.
Amon: I feel like it gets to the essence of Spider-Man better than any of the other MCU Spidey movies. It's not perfect. They could have done better by some of the villains. But there are moments in that film where you will remember where you were when you watched them for the first time. I can't get enough of that.
Ben: That they managed to pull off the tonal swing from Aunt May's death, which is devastating, and brutally sad, to the sheer joy and lightness of the moment when the other guys show up, is astonishing.
Chris: Right, enough squabbling. Let's vote!

THE ORDER

1



SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE (2018)
Amon: "Miles Morales takes centre stage in a film that combines groundbreaking animation with storytelling that gets to the heart of what makes Spidey special. Fresh and flawless, it's not just the best Spidey film: it's one of the best superhero movies ever made, period."

2



SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME (2021)
Helen: "With so many moving parts, this had no right to be this good."

3



SPIDER-MAN 2 (2004)
Chris: "Peter loses his powers; Sam Raimi shows off his, wielding the camera like it's on a spider-rope."

4



SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING (2017)
Ben: "Fresh, fun, and light on its feet, with the peppiest Peter Parker yet."

5



SPIDER-MAN (2002)
Chris: "Its cheesiness has gone a little off, but when this — the daddy of them all — swings, it swings hard."

6



SPIDER-MAN: FAR FROM HOME (2019)
Chris: "For me, this is slightly funnier and sweeter than *Homecoming*."

7



SPIDER-MAN 3 (2007)
Helen: "The addition of Venom was misconceived, but the rest of it is at least weird in an interesting way."

8



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN (2012)
Ben: "Garfield and Stone are amazing. The rest of this confused post-*Batman Begins* Spidey? Not so much."

9



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2 (2014)
Amon: "An Electro so disastrous, he merited an overhaul in *No Way Home*."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT:
LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE

The No-Bull Guide To Making An Indie

No money? No problem. PAUL ANDREW WILLIAMS, director of *Bull*, tells you how

IN THE TEN years since his last movie, the gentle drama *Song For Marion*, director Paul Andrew Williams had been working almost exclusively in television, with the acclaimed likes of *Murdered By My Boyfriend* under his belt. But he was itching to get back to making movies, and decided to take matters into his own hands by writing and directing *Bull*, an ultra-low-budget revenge thriller in which Neil Maskell hunts down the men responsible for... well, that would be telling. But the moral of the story is, according to Williams, that anyone can follow in his footsteps. So here are some of his tips, should you wish to make your own movie.

JUST DO IT

At the risk of being sued by Nike, that's Williams' basic mantra. "*Bull*'s the third film I've made where we've had no money, and we're like, 'Fuck it, we're gonna do it regardless,'" says the director of *London To Brighton* and *Cherry Tree Lane*. *Bull* was ultimately budgeted, with the money coming from a number of sources, for £500,000, enough to fund a breakneck shoot of just 18 days. "Don't expect anyone to do it for you," he says. "Write a script that you know you can do for a certain amount of money, and do it yourself. Learn how to do the things you need."

DON'T SEE IT AS A GET-RICH-QUICK SCHEME

There's a prevailing school of thought that working on a movie can be a lucrative endeavour. After he made *London To Brighton*, Williams got a cheque, his part of the profits from the film. It was for £900. "We didn't make anything out of that," he says. "Very few filmmakers make films for money. And no-one makes an independent film for money." He didn't make much more off *Bull*. In other words, make the film because it's a story you're absolutely aching to tell. If that then leads to other jobs within the industry, and situations where you can make a living from it, great. But don't let that be the driving force for you.

WRITE TO THE BUDGET

When Williams came up with the idea for *Bull*, he deliberately wanted to make something that could be made ultra-fast, and ultra-cheap. Initially, he wanted to shoot it entirely in Welsh, but pivoted back to English, keeping the locations and action to a minimum. "When we started I said, 'I want to burn a caravan, I want an abattoir and I want a funfair. If you can get me those three things, I'll work everything else out. Houses are ten-a-penny.'"

ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

For Williams, a major galvanising factor is a start date. He advises choosing one and sticking to it, even if you're not quite ready. "I don't care if we've got this or that, I know that if we start on this date we'll have something in the can." One of *Bull*'s biggest sequences involves Maskell visiting the aforementioned funfair and unleashing violence upon some ne'er-do-wells. It's an elaborate sequence that would, in an ideal world,





Top to bottom: Neil Maskell burns the screen as the revenge-seeking Bull; A splendid caravan fire on a budget; Director Paul Andrew Williams with Tamzin Outhwaite — as Bull's sister-in-law Sharon — on set.





Top to bottom: Williams gives the orders; Outhwaite alongside David Hayman as mobster Norm, Bull's icy-cold former father-in-law, who might want to watch his back.



have taken the best part of a week to shoot. Williams had two days and, thanks to Covid and budgetary restrictions, just ten extras. "So we need everyone to have three jackets, and switch them," he laughs. "There were other things I wanted to do in that fair, but the bottom line is, you need to tell the story."

SCHEDULE WISELY

If you're shooting across 18 days, and you have 35 locations, make sure that those locations are tightly grouped. And remember that locations can be versatile. "Once you find an estate, or a group of estates that are close by, you can make them look different," explains Williams. "You can basically combine one place into four different locations." Those locations may also dictate crew choices — if an experienced crew member lives far away and has to drive to set, or be put up in a hotel, that may lead you to go with an inexperienced, or even first-time, person who lives close by.

DON'T BE DAUNTED

Setbacks will happen. An actor may drop out with a week to go before filming. Money may become tight. You may only be able to afford meagre catering. But it's important to keep going. "I would make another low-budget movie tomorrow," says Williams. "If someone gave me leadoff [financing] money, I wouldn't know what the fuck to do, to be honest." It will be tough, but he has some words of encouragement. "Do you know how many people want to make a film and never get to make one?" he asks. Loads, seems to be the answer. "So if you're making a film, you're already in the top ten per cent." And that's no Bull. **CHRIS HEWITT**



BULL IS OUT NOW ON DIGITAL

MARK KERMODE'S MOVIE PLAYLIST

THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO PRESENTER CHOOSES SCORES HE'S BEEN PLAYING ON HIS WEEKLY SHOW



GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI

BY **SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI**

Director/writer/producer Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who helmed the BAFTA-nominated Devdas, also shares song-writing credits on the six-track EP from this adventurous Bollywood gem, which has become something of a fixture on my Scala Radio show. Inspired by the book *Mafia Queens Of Mumbai*, the film features a barnstorming central performance by Alia Bhatt as the woman who escapes a life of sexual slavery to become a powerful advocate for the rights of sex-workers in Mumbai's red-light district. The subject matter may be tough, but the film has a thrillingly mainstream edge thanks to some typically enthralling dance and musical fantasy sequences. Soundtrack highlights include 'Jab Saiyaan', in which Shreya Ghoshal's vocals intertwine with a harmonium and a sarangi; 'Dholida', which has been tipped by *Firstpost*'s Devansh Sharma to "dominate the dandiya season later this year"; and the gorgeous 'Muskurahat', featuring the voice of Arijit Singh, known as 'The King Of Playback Singing'. Worth noting, too, that among the film's many dedications is one to the legendary Lata Mangeshkar, whose work we've featured many times on Scala.

TED K

BY **BLANCK MASS**

Benjamin John Power, aka Blanck Mass, composed my favourite film score of 2020, for the powerful Irish drama *Calm With Horses*. His latest score is for *Ted K*, starring Sharlto Copley as the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski. We previewed the main theme. 'Montana', on Scala prior to the digital release of the OST — a vinyl release is also on the way. Benjamin told us, "'Montana' landed with director Tony Stone almost instantly and paved the sonic identity for the landscape of the score. The opening scene seemed very reminiscent of Sergio Leone with its sense of isolation. From here on in, scoring the complexities of Ted's mind took many different shapes, but the overriding feeling of isolation and descent never strayed too far."

ARTHUR RAMBO

BY **CHLOÉ THÉVENIN**

French experimental electronic composer Chloé Thévenin's film projects have included a 2012 live performance of music for the BFI's restoration of Hitchcock's silent classic, *Blackmail*. Her latest feature score is for Laurent Cantet's *Arthur Rambo*, which follows the "sharp rise and sudden fall" of a writer in the social-media age. We've been playing 'A La Dérive', which, to my ear, has echoes of Tangerine Dream's pulsing music for *Sorcerer* — another Scala favourite.

scala RADIO

MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW, IN ASSOCIATION WITH *EMPIRE*, IS ON SCALA RADIO ON SATURDAYS FROM 1-3PM (SCALARADIO.CO.UK)



Jackie Chan revs up for some motorcycle mayhem.

THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest films of all time, one film at a time

Police Story

IN A MOMENT OF desperation towards *Police Story*'s end, maverick cop Chan Ka-Kui (Jackie Chan) has to figure out how he can traverse several storeys of a shopping mall before a Mob boss has a chance to destroy crucial evidence. The solution: he takes a daring, eight-foot leap onto a pole and slides down it, crashing through hundreds of sparking light bulbs and a glass kiosk at the bottom.

One problem: Chan was sick with exhaustion from filming *Heart Of Dragon* during the day with long-time collaborator and friend Sammo Hung, then shooting *Police Story* at night. The latter had been going on for months by the time Chan elected to perform the mall pole stunt — the most ludicrous stunt in the film, and maybe even Chan's whole career. It was an action beat he had to perform without rehearsal, with no safety net, and with the chance of electrocution on the way down. The stunt went as well as it could have done, though it added a dislocated pelvis, damaged vertebrae and second-degree burns on his palms to Chan's list of injuries (the story goes that he still had a beer afterwards, en route to the *Heart Of Dragon* set). The final result is played three times for our viewing pleasure, in a sort of large-scale expansion of Chan's usual trick where he would repeat shots for added impact. In other hands this would seem like narcissism; in Chan's, it seems partly triggered by disbelief that he lived through it. It's a testament to his unswerving commitment to the cause, the equivalent of a post-match panel poring over a winning goal. There's an element of, "Can you believe I did this for real?" to it.

It indicates the level of physical commitment required for *Police Story*, a film full of explosive action from the jump (and including the jump). It landed at the height of Jackie Chan's 1980s stardom, the martial-arts legend having done three films with Hung that same year (1985), though the production of *Police Story* was directly inspired by a feeling of failure, prompted by Chan's dissatisfaction with his role in Hollywood film *The Protector*, directed by James Glickenhaus. Though the movie itself was mediocre, film historian James Oliver's essay for Eureka's recent *Police Story* 1 and 2 Masters Of Cinema release notes that it led to Chan's realisation that he could bring his novel type of high-flying martial-arts action to a grittier, modern (and extremely '80s) cop drama.

Written by Chan and Edward Tang (who worked on Chan's directorial debut, *The Young Master*, and continued to collaborate with him for decades), *Police Story* was built (as many of Chan's films were) entirely around its set-pieces, a shopping list of stunts and spaces through which Chan would duck and weave and punch and kick. That focus on movement rather than overly busy mythology is something more American films could use. Though Chan's style of shooting always differed from the usual practices of Hollywood, it's hard not to see the extra daring and painful perfectionism of *Police Story* as in part a response to his bad experience dipping a toe into that industry.

It's the film Chan considers his best work,

Alamy, Getty Images, Photofest





Above: Chan catches a bus, in unique fashion. **Left:** Ouch! Chan's copper shows a goon who's boss.

and that's hard to argue against. *Police Story* is a perfect marriage of action and comedy, thanks to Chan and his stunt team's action design, using every corner of every space in the film. The fun starts early, with a quite literal bang as a sting operation goes south fast, the perps sending a fleet of cars barrelling through a shanty town on a hill (homaged by Michael Bay in the Cuba section of *Bad Boys II*). Not long after, Chan chases a bus on foot and hangs from it using just an umbrella.

Chan's action has a distinct tempo, and the way he cuts through fight sequences is exhilarating. His fast-paced but clear style of editing — developed from his time working with Sammo Hung — places emphasis on the moment of impact as well as a clear view of the choreography, with multiple angles dedicated to individual hits as well as the broader flow of combat.

The hand-to-hand fights remain just as exciting as the larger-scale action, though, with Chan's signature mix of speed and a loose, flexible physicality as he scrambles and swings and leaps around each space, switching between prop fighting and his bare fists in obsessively detailed and believable, painful choreography.

There are plenty of jokes built into that action too, such as an early fight in a car park that sees various goons dropkicked through the same car windshield, as Chan continually clambers up, through and over the parked vehicles. Speaking of which, this film must hold some kind of record for the most people to be defenestrated, whether they're being booted through car windshields, or roundhouse-kicked through second-storey windows and glass tables — there's a reason the crew jokingly referred to the film as 'Glass Story' on set, a nod to the several hundreds of pounds of sugar glass they smashed. The stunts were as painful to do as they look, with most members of the Jackie Chan Stunt Team having made multiple trips to hospital, as emphasised by the film's end-credits B-roll footage.

And that's just the action sequences. As with his other films, there's an array of delightfully slapstick sight gags that make full use of Chan's spry physicality, such as when he's relegated to a rural precinct to answer dozens of ringing phones simultaneously, or the moment we see him moonwalking cow shit off his shoe. A key part of the charm of Chan's approach is that he's not afraid to look foolish. His face is a great asset when expressing the immense strain of his actions or mugging though scenes where his character gets humbled, including during the absurd pageantry of a PR campaign for his precinct or a sequence full of double entendres that has Chan getting a face full of cake (twice), as well as a compromised witness statement.

The film was a huge domestic and international hit, spawning a franchise that ran through several (also pretty great) sequels and even a reboot series (not so great). It's a movie made at the height of Chan's powers and vitality (he was in his early thirties at the time), and to talk about it feels like talking about the baseline pleasures of cinema itself — to observe bodies in motion, to witness a perfect dance between action and the rhythm of montage. He was already known for making films in the tradition of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, but *Police Story* feels less like an homage to those old masters, and more like it springs entirely from Chan's imagination — from conception to direction to stuntwork. He even sings the theme tune. It's the creative equivalent of a death-defying leap down a pole in a shopping mall, and he nailed the landing. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

POLICE STORY **IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL.**

JACKIE CHAN IN NUMBERS



7/4/1954
JACKIE CHAN IS BORN AS KONG-SANG CHAN IN HONG KONG

1962 THE YEAR HIS FIRST FILM, *BIG AND LITTLE WONG TIN BAR*, WAS RELEASED. HE PLAYED CHEUNG 6 BA (JUVENILE), AND WAS CREDITED AS YUEN LAU

1979
The year his first movie as director, *The Fearless Hyena*, was released

1976
The year Chan created the Jackie Chan Stunt Team

1989
The year he was awarded an MBE

20
The number of albums he's released

1 ACADEMY AWARD WON (AN HONORARY AWARD IN 2017)

15
The number of credits he held on *Chinese Zodiac*, breaking the world record previously held by Robert Rodriguez

1.4 MILLION
The number of followers he has on Twitter as @EyeOfJackieChan

95 THE NUMBER OF EPISODES OF ANIMATED SHOW *JACKIE CHAN ADVENTURES*

$665.7 MILLION
The amount grossed by his biggest film, *Kung Fu Panda 2*



Anatomy of a Chopper

Two decades on, ERIC BANA on how he played Australia's most feared criminal

THE LAST TIME Eric Bana watched *Chopper* was with his kids. Don't worry — they were both more than old enough to watch Bana's breakthrough performance in Andrew Dominik's blistering debut, in which he played Mark 'Chopper' Read, a moustachioed, tattooed real-life criminal who stabbed and shot first, and asked questions later. "I probably watched the first ten minutes and left," he laughs, down the phone line from his Melbourne home. "It's amazing to have people talking about it all these years later."

Chopper, in which Bana is charismatic, terrifying, psychopathic and hilarious, often in the same scene, put him onto Hollywood's radar and paved the way for *Hulk*, *Troy*, *Star Trek* and more. Now remastered for a new release, we asked Bana to break down how he got to grips with his Chopper.

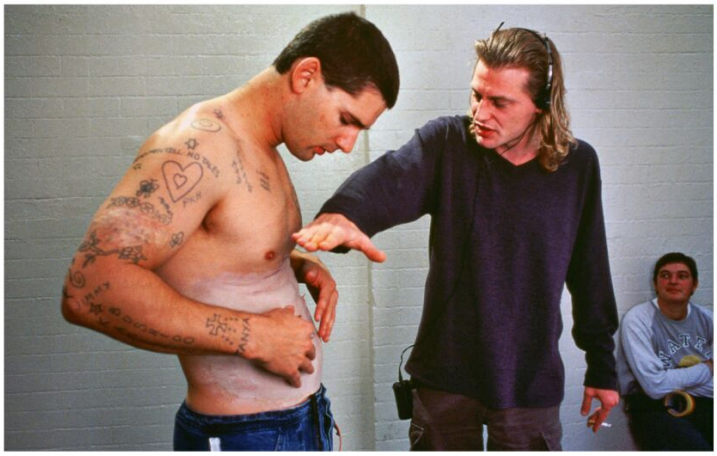
THE INSPIRATION

When Bana was first cast, he and Dominik spent three days with the real-life Chopper, picking his brains and getting under his skin. "He told a million stories," says Bana. "I don't think he drew breath. After, I was ready to sleep for three days. Just being in that presence, and getting a sense of how much energy he can take out of the room was something to behold."

Even as filming started, though the combustible Chopper stayed away from the set, there were still ways he could derail everything. "If Mark reoffended, we were done," laughs Bana. "We were one offence away from the film never being made." Thankfully, Chopper — who pivoted to becoming a children's author, of all things, before he died in 2013 — stayed on the straight and narrow. Relatively speaking.

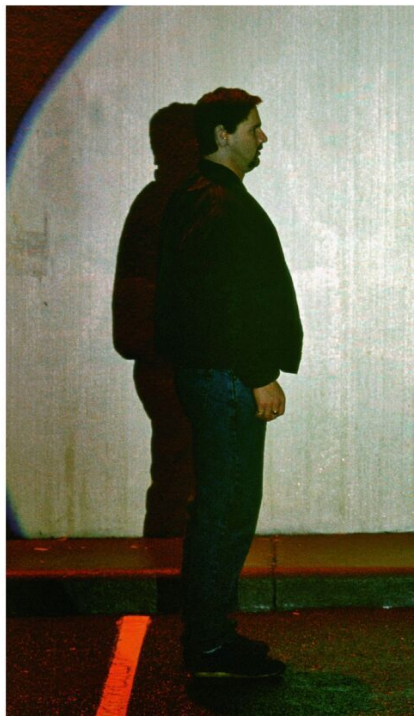


Right: "I'm mad, me!" Eric Bana as Aussie gangster Mark 'Chopper' Read. **Below:** Bana with director Andrew Dominik on set.



THE LOOK

Bana played Chopper at two different ages, separated by a decade or so. For the film's opening act, shot in the Pentridge prison where Chopper had served time, Bana was assaying a younger, leaner Chopper. "I didn't have as many visual tools in my arsenal," he says of that period, which took place before Chopper grew his 'tache, popped in a gold tooth or two, and even had his ears cut off so as to get out of a particularly grim part of prison. "I didn't have the weight and the tattoos. The pressure on Andrew and me was pretty large. Every scene, every moment of that

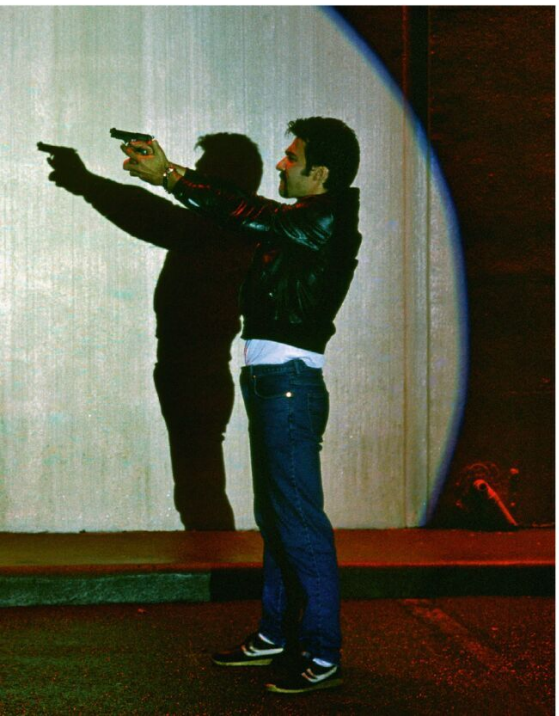








Top: Bigger and moustachioed in his later years. **Above:** Chopper after getting his ears, er, chopped off. **Below left:** A stand-off with Sammy The Turk (Serge Liistro).



film, there is tension, there is violence, there is threat. The first half was definitely more intensive than the second."

First part completed, production shut down for four weeks while Bana shaved his head (Chopper's brush-cut was a wig), grew the handlebar moustache and piled on the pounds to play the older, larger Chopper. "It's one of my pet hates, actors talking about body transformations," Bana says. "It was what it was, and [the weight] took a hell of a lot longer to take off. But I remember going to the football, and people moving out of my way. I was like, 'I get it now, why guys have this look.'"

THE VOICE

Bana was a famous comedian, with his own sketch show on Australian TV, when he was cast. A talented mimic, Bana was impersonating all sorts, from Cruise to Columbo, but he knew he needed to go further with Chopper. "If we were doing a quick sketch on *Full Frontal*, it would have been quite easy," he says. "I'd just come out of six years of sketch comedy and ten years of stand-up, so if I couldn't do it at that point in my career, I was never going to be able to do it. The first 70 per cent, the gregarious storytelling, came to me pretty quickly, but the last 30 per cent was where all the work went into. Most of that was on the psychological side."

THE VIBE

Ah, the psychological side. Chopper was the kind of character best described as 'complicated'. He was prone to wild mood swings, and was the sort of guy who could (as seen in that opening act) explode into violence out of nowhere, stab a fellow prisoner in the face, immediately experience extreme remorse, then try to jovially talk to the guy as he's bleeding to death, before snapping again and delivering one of the film's signature quotes: "I'm not the fucking dumb cunt pissing blood, mate."

For Bana, capturing that volatility was the biggest challenge. "We had the confidence in knowing that it was all true, because it was all anecdotal," he says. "That complexity was what made him so fascinating, and so scary. When Chopper walked into a room, people knew what he was capable of. I realised early there was no way as an actor that I could act being that tough. That's not something you can hope to portray. But the erratic behaviour was doable for me, because I knew there was a truth behind it." As Chopper himself said, he was just a bloody normal bloke. A normal bloke who liked a bit of torture. **CHRIS HEWITT**

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THE CULT OF KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist selects the month's weirdest home-ent releases



AT 194 MINUTES, Kier-La Janisse's documentary Woodlands Dark And Days Bewitched: A History Of Folk Horror is impressively comprehensive. In its opening argument, *Woodlands Dark...* looks at three influential British films — *Witchfinder General* (1968), *The Blood On Satan's Claw* (1971) and *The Wicker Man* (1973) — and some well-remembered, creepy British TV productions of the same vintage. Each establishes essentials of the form: a sense of haunted landscape, ritual and sacrifice; insular communities beguiling and entrapping outsiders; pagan witchery and Puritan repression; strong musical accompaniment (as an expression, 'folk horror' is analogous to 'folk rock'); and many creepy locals parading in animal masks or wearing skulls, antlers and hides.

In recent years, folk horror has produced high-profile revivals — *The Witch*, *Midsommar*, *In The Earth* — which, inevitably, has encouraged filmmakers with limited resources to trek into their nearest national park and get in touch with dark, primal spookiness. See: *Sacrifice*, *Shepherd*, *Sacrilege*, *Sleep* and *Mandrake*.

Though most associated with Britain, much recent folk horror has come from American backwoods. Jeremiah Kipp's Slapface is about the relationship between an alienated young boy and a monster — but is also a subtle, affecting, strange drama about moral quandaries and kids forced to cope with things adults couldn't handle. Orphaned brothers Lucas (August Maturo) and Tom (Mike Manning) struggle with the day-to-day by performing a ritual of slapping that's impossible to explain to outsiders. Lucas wanders the woods accepting dares from bullying twin girls, which takes him to the lair of a kid-killing creature known as the Virago. Remarkably, *Slapface* feels as real as *Winter's Bone* or *Leave No Trace* as a story of a bleak stretch of left-behind America but finds room for a seven-foot-tall, hook-nosed, face-in-shadow apparition, who could be a 'realistic' reboot of every wicked witch in the cartoon canon.

Edoardo Vitaletti's The Last Thing Mary Saw is a Puritan gothic tale. In 1843, young Mary (Stefanie Scott) — bandage over her eyes and blood on her cheeks — is interrogated about what happened to her family. Flashbacks reveal their fates — which, as might be expected, were not happy. Judith Roberts (the 'Beautiful Girl Across The Hall' from *Eraserhead*) is striking as a witch-like matriarch whose death is an inciting incident in the plot, as a cold, cruel, misogynist reading of the Bible brands any expression of female emotion or sensuality unholy. Isabelle Fuhrman (the sinister tyke from *Orphan*) is the maid who coaxes Mary out of her meekness, though consciousness-raising inevitably leads to a house littered with corpses.

Miles Doleac's Demigod (2021) is set in the Black Forest and boasts odd accents and subtitled dialogue — but was shot in America. It starts as a slow burn, as Robin (Rachel Nichols) and husband Leo (Yohance Myles) visit a hunting lodge she's inherited from a woodsy grandfather who once made her eat a stag's eyeball — and Robin is assailed by bad memories and evil omens. Then, it shifts into a faster, more action/monster style as the incomers and locals alike are abducted by three witches and a masked thug is to be sacrificed to Cernunnos, God Of The Hunt, who manifests as a LARPing minotaur with red penlight eyes and stalks doomed folk through the primal forest. Some of the fringe characters are creepier and odder than the monster, who comes across as more demi than god.

CULT HERO OF THE MONTH

THE ADAMS FAMILY

Not to be confused with the Addams Family, the Adams family — John Adams, Toby Poser and their daughter Zelda — are a low-budget DIY filmmaking collective, who share writing/directing credits, act and compose/perform music. They've worked together since *Rumblestrips* (2013) and are drawn to backwoods horror, even making a spooky Western, *The Hatred* (2018). Their breakthrough was *The Deeper You Dig* (2019), an intense ghost story about a drunk driver (J. Adams) drawn to the psychic mother (Poser) of a teen (Z. Adams) he's killed but can't bury in frozen ground. Their follow-up, *Hellbender* (2021), is insanely ambitious for a small-scale movie. John is killed off early so mother and daughter hold centre screen as 'hellbenders' who live apart from humanity, perform together in a rock group, practise weird magic, and live out their own strange version of the circle of life.

Illustration: Neil Edwards. Alamy

6 OF THE BEST

Team *Empire* on the month's essential movies and TV

PICK OF THE MONTH



FLEE

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15** / **89 MINS**
DVD BR

The decision to animate this sublime documentary — *Waltz With Bashir*-style — originally served a function: to preserve the anonymity of its subject, a gay Afghan refugee (Amin), relating the story of his attempt to build a new life in Denmark after escaping the Afghan civil war in 1989. But out of that has flowed an artistry that elevates the narrative, whether it's finding beauty in such moments as the sharing of a pair of Walkman headphones, or plunging us into the harrowing incidents of Amin's journey. Director Jonas Poher Rasmussen's highlighting of the West's treatment of refugees feels dispiritingly timely, but he allows the joy to shine through, too, giving the film a piquant bittersweetness. **DAN JOLIN**



JULES ET JIM

OUT **25 APRIL** / CERT **PG** / **106 MINS**
BR

A gold standard of the French Nouvelle Vague, *Jules Et Jim* has lost none of its fizz in the six decades since its release. It's set in the years around World War I — but the form, fashion and feeling is unmistakably 1960s cool. Key to that is François Truffaut's directorial bravado, melding innovative editing, third-person narration, stills, archive footage and freewheeling, handheld photography. Truffaut establishes hallmarks here that continue to influence artful filmmaking today, while Jeanne Moreau defined what might later be uncharitably described as a manic pixie dream girl. As Jim (Henri Serre) describes her character: "She's a vision for all… perhaps not meant for any one man alone." **JOHN NUGENT**



BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE

OUT **25 APRIL** / CERT **PG** / **87 MINS**
DVD BR 4K

In the late 1950s, Hammer Films revitalised British horror and other companies scurried to get in on the act, often with exaggeratedly lurid effects. The first knock-off was *Blood Of The Vampire*, produced by Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman before their TV supersuccess with *The Saint*. Here, Sir Donald Wolfit plays a sadistic, mad scientist who suffers from a blood condition that drives him to a kind of vampirism. With Victor Maddern in extreme mangleface make-up as the Igor equivalent and Barbara Shelley as a heroine frequently tied to pillars or operating tables, the dialogue is as unspeakable as the behaviour of the baddies. But it's a glorious, gruesome romp all the same. **KIM NEWMAN**



SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME

OUT **NOW** / CERT **12** / **142 MINS**
DVD BR 4K

Now that the spider-cat is out of the bag, it's a little easier to talk about the third part of Jon Watts' MCU *Spider-Man* trilogy. Shorn of the fervent audience reaction which turned the major cameos (yes, Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield are in this movie) into extraordinary, hair-raising events, it's easier to focus on the deft job Watts does in amping up the emotional impact of a series that had largely, until then, been the MCU's funniest. From the death of one major character to the redemptive rescue of another, it's a film with its heart on its spidery sleeve, wringing genuine pathos from what could have been mere fan service. And it's also still very funny, with Garfield in particular on gonzo form. **CHRIS HEWITT**



SUCCESSION: SEASON 3

OUT **2 MAY** / CERT **15** / **540 MINS**
DVD BR

No family is straightforward, but then, no family is quite as messed up as the Roys family. TV's most backstabbing bunch return for the most deliciously dramatic season yet, as tensions rise between father Logan (Brian Cox) and son Kendall (Jeremy Strong), and the other children and aides struggle to pick which side they're on. Season 3 features some of the HBO show's most brilliant comedic moments (dick pics and UTIs both have their time in the sun), and undoubtedly the best mic-drop twist of the year, in which every character's position of power is threatened once more. When will it end? Who will win? As ever, nobody is safe — and it's so thrilling to feel that danger. **ELLA KEMP**



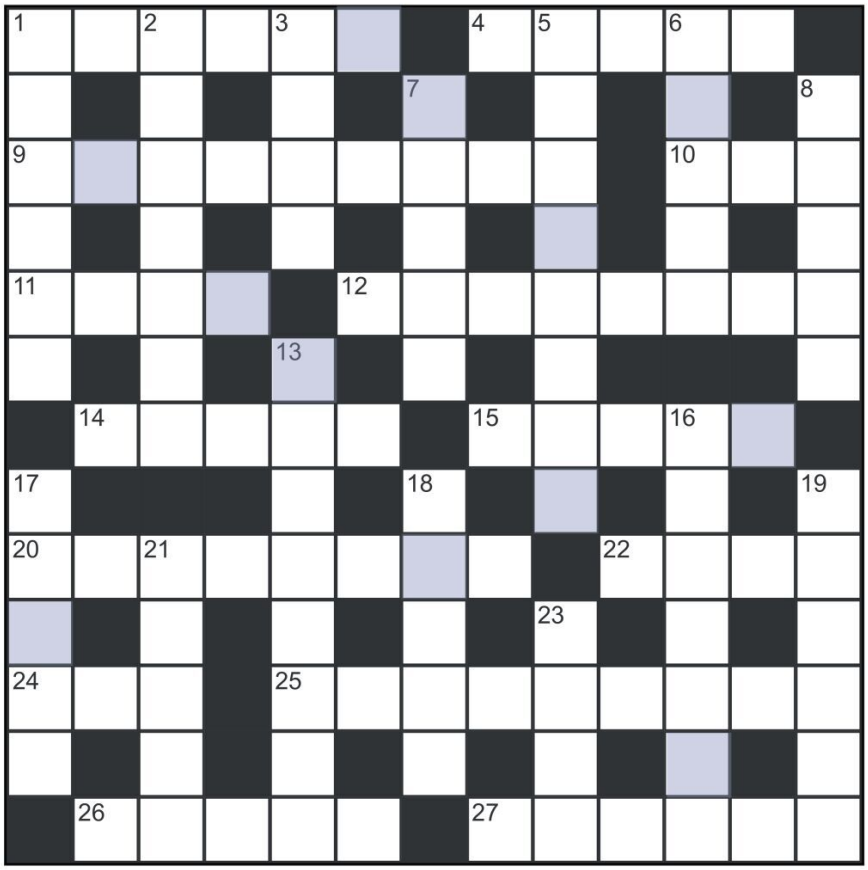
COW

OUT **18 APRIL** / CERT **12** / **94 MINS**
DVD BR

Cows in a field may make us smile, and their derivatives fill our bellies, but in her first documentary, *Fish Tank* and *American Honey* director Andrea Arnold turns her camera on the stuff we don't see, from the birth of a calf (to the film's bovine subject, Luma) to the inevitable end. Its novelty may have been stolen by its porcine counterpart, *Gunda*, but *Cow* remains an arresting, empathetic and dispiriting cow's-eye view of the industrialised agribusiness we co-sign with every burger or glass of milk. Watching Luma welcome her offspring into the world or gambolling in a field — who knew cows could gambol? — you may wonder why dogs get the love and cows get the abattoir. **DAVID HUGHES**

Alamy

CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



ACROSS

1 Country of Isabelle Huppert and Isabelle Adjani (6)
4 It can follow Game, Date or Prom in film titles (5)
9/26 Across *Avengers* actor who joins Benedict Cumberbatch in the *Multiverse Of Madness* (9,5)
10 Aka Thomas Anderson (3)
11 Maybe Mara, maybe McKinnon (4)
12 Kathryn Bigelow's vampire road movie (4,4)
14 This was Rian Johnson's solid directorial debut (5)
15 Elgort, who sang and danced through *West Side Story* (5)
20 It threatened Armageddon in *Armageddon* (8)
22 — *Year* (Amy Adams) (4)
24 One in Beverly Hills or a Kindergarten (3)
25 It's Cary Grant's real first name (9)
26 See 9 Across
27 What the 4 Across is in a Jennifer Jones film (6)

DOWN

1 Friday is like this if the name's Jodie or Lindsay (6)
2 *The* —, Scorsese's biopic of Howard Hughes (7)
3 Could be Jackie or Gemma (4)
5/23 Down Crime movie from 2014 by the director of *Licorice Pizza* (8,4)
6 Saoirse Ronan's teenage assassin (5)
7 The credits list its protagonist as Protagonist (5)
8 Thriller consisting entirely of Tom Hardy on the phone in his car (5)
13 "He was Tony Montana. The world will remember him by another name…" (8)
16 Promising young filmmaker Fennell (7)
17 Colin Firth's Mark in the *Bridget Jones* films (5)
18 Wednesday is like this if the name's Christina (5)
19 It links Miles Morales and a Cronenberg film (6)
21 He was *Fiddler On The Roof*'s Tevye and *Flash Gordon*'s Zarkov (5)
23 See 5 Down

WIN!

A PAIR OF EDIFIER S3000 PRO SPEAKERS



If you're looking to upgrade the sound in your home-entertainment system, it's worth having a crack at the crossword this month, as we've got a snazzy piece of kit to give away to one lucky winner. Edifier S3000 Pro speakers (RRP £699) boast a host of attributes to oomph up your living room. Here's the science bit: wireless connectivity; Hi-Res Certified quality; Planar diaphragm tweeters; 6.5" (179mm) bass unit; Qualcomm®aptX™ HD decoding. To speak plainly, they'll be, ahem, music to your ears. If you'd like to get your hands on a pair, just solve the puzzle, work out the anagram and to enter, follow the instructions below.

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HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, director or character. Visit www.empireonline.com/crossword and fill out the form along with your answer in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on 9 May. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

MAY ANSWERS ACROSS: 1 Capra, **4** Clerks, **8** Indiana, **9** Death, **10** Short, **11** Russian, **13** Babel, **15** Crazy, **18** Elektra, **19** Eliza, **22** Angel, **24** Face/Off, **25** Driver, **26** Royal. **DOWN: 1** Chips, **2** Pedro, **3** Apartment, **4** Claire, **5** End, **6** Kravitz, **7** Shine, **12** Streetcar, **14** Avenger, **16** Regan, **17** Gaffer, **20** Ivory, **21** Awful, **23** Liv.

ANAGRAM AMERICA CHAVEZ

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Entries are free. Entries must be received before 10 May or will not be valid. The Competition is only open to people aged 18 and over who live in the United Kingdom and are not a Bauer employee or their immediate family. One winner will be selected at random from all valid entries. Competition promoted by H Bauer Publishing t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final, and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, via email, between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will email the winner a maximum of three times. If the winner does not respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner at random and the original winner will not win a prize. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html



CLASSIC SCENE

Standout sequences from the great movies

The Empire Strikes Back

Chosen by CHLOÉ ZHAO

Chloé Zhao: "We didn't have *Star Wars* when I was growing up. I saw it on VHS tape in boarding school. My order was all messed up. I watched *The Phantom Menace* first, before I watched the originals. There was no internet at that time. I remember seeing the poster of little Anakin and the shadow [of Darth Vader], and that poster affected me so much. I just knew, 'Whatever that poster is saying, whoever that shadow is, is going to be my favourite character of all time.' And it didn't disappoint when I found the VHS tape of the original movies. So, 'I am your father,' was a very big one for me."

EXT. CLOUD CITY WALKWAY — DAY

Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and Darth Vader (David Prowse/James Earl Jones) are locked in a gruelling lightsaber duel. Red and blue laser swords clash. Vader, the stronger of the two, is forcing Luke back with every blow. Dodging and ducking, Luke repels Vader's attacks. Eventually he falls onto his back. Vader holds him at saber-point.

DARTH VADER: You are beaten. It is useless to resist. Don't let yourself be destroyed, as Obi-Wan did.

Luke backs up. Defiant, he sweeps Vader's lightsaber aside, and rolls away. Vader slashes and misses, buying Luke just enough time to get back on his feet. They fight again. After an exchange of blows, Luke manages to hit Vader on the right arm. Vader cries out in pain, and doubles his efforts.

Swiping aggressively, Vader forces Luke to clamber onto a ledge, jutting out over a sheer drop. Vader attacks again, cutting through some metal pillars. He manages to get Luke off-balance and…

... cuts off Luke's right hand. The severed hand, and the lightsaber it holds, plummet over the side. Luke roars in agony. He falls to his haunches and looks up at Vader, who closes in.

DARTH VADER: There is no escape. Don't make me destroy you.

Luke begins to edge backwards, away from Vader, moving along the ledge.

DARTH VADER: Luke, you do not yet realise your importance. You have only begun to discover your power. Join me and I will complete your training. With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.

Luke has now reached the end of the line. There is nowhere else to go. He looks back at Vader, defiantly.

LUKE SKYWALKER: I'll never join you!

DARTH VADER: If you only knew the power of the dark side. Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father.

LUKE SKYWALKER: He told me enough! He told me you killed him!

DARTH VADER: No… I am your father.

The Imperial March plays softly as Luke takes in the news. He's not best pleased.

LUKE SKYWALKER: No. No! That's not true! That's impossible!

DARTH VADER: Search your feelings, you know it to be true.

Luke screams, "Noooooooo!" in agony. Physical, existential, all of it.

DARTH VADER: Luke, you can destroy the Emperor. He has foreseen this. It is your destiny. Join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son.

Luke glances around. He looks down at the impossible drop beneath him. He looks back at Vader.

DARTH VADER: Come with me. It is the only way.

Luke disagrees. Trusting in the Force, he lets go and falls into thin air…



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